

Person-Centered Outcome Measures and Behavioral Health

The state of behavioral health quality measurement.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) reports that in 2021 nearly 1 in 3 adults in the United States had a behavioral health condition. Since behavioral health encompasses both mental health conditions and substance use disorders—which may require different treatment approaches—it can be challenging to develop standardized metrics that can apply uniformly across conditions. As a result, although research supports measurement-based care in behavioral health settings, few providers have consistently adopted this practice. Numerous quality measures exist for assessing behavioral health care, yet only some have received national endorsement or demonstrate sufficient evidence in improving outcomes.

To address these challenges in evaluating the quality of care delivered in behavioral health, patients, providers and policymakers are advocating for adoption of the person-centered outcome (PCO) measures for behavioral health.

Why PCO measures?

To assure high-quality and effective health care—and **more efficient, effective and equitable care for people with chronic and complex needs**—outcomes must be measured and tracked in a standardized way. Too often, however, the measures used to assess behavioral health care delivery are focused on how the care is delivered rather than on the results it generates. The **PCO measures** work in tandem with **clinical care** to standardize documentation and tracking, and measure progress over time using patient-reported outcome measures or goal attainment scaling.

In many behavioral health settings, goals are already being collected and documented but fail to track or report goal achievement. However, the PCO measures enable the identification and tracking of progress against these goals within a standardized framework, enhancing clarity in outcome reporting. As a standardized method that aligns with existing practices, adoption of the PCO measures increases transparency in oversight of the delivery of person-centered care while improving the individual’s care experience.



What are the benefits of using the PCO measures to address behavioral health?

For individuals with behavioral health needs, care should align with the outcome goals that matter to them. This measurement-based care strategy can provide a framework to aid providers in delivering care aligned with these goals. Additionally, the PCO measures offer flexibility for individuals with chronic behavioral health conditions recognizing that progress might be incremental and might not follow a linear path.

Goals can include a broad range of topics, such as those related to managing behavioral health symptoms, participating in activities that impact a person's quality of life or ability to access, afford and utilize appropriate health and community resources. For example, an individual could set a goal to stop using substances within six months or start following a sleep schedule over the next two months to help manage mental health symptoms.

Adoption of the PCO measures makes it easier for payers and policymakers to better understand and track quality care to support value-based payment and person-centered care.

What do we know about implementation of the PCO measures in a behavioral health setting?

The PCO measures are currently being tested in certified community behavioral health clinics (CCBHCs), primary care and other behavioral health settings across the country.

Preliminary results have revealed some specific qualitative findings from providers and individual feedback including:

- Improved communication between the provider and individual being served.
- Increased patient engagement and trust-building.
- Better understanding of the individual's preferences and how to use those preferences to guide care.

When PCO measures are implemented in behavioral health settings, individuals can access the care they need to reach the goals they seek to achieve.

Additional resources

Download the latest white paper, Behavioral Health Care Integration: Challenges and Opportunities for Quality Measurement, [here](#).

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