

Adapting Washington Circle Performance Measures for Public Sector Substance Abuse Treatment Systems

Deborah W. Garnick, Sc.D., Margaret T. Lee, Ph.D., Constance M. Horgan, Sc.D., Andrea Acevedo, M.S., Washington Circle Public Sector Workgroup

Abstract

The Washington Circle, a group focused on developing and disseminating performance measures for substance abuse services, developed three such measures for private health plans. In this article, we explore whether these measures are appropriate for meeting measurement goals in the public sector and feasible to calculate in the public sector using data collected for administrative purposes by state and local substance abuse and/or mental health agencies. Working collaboratively, 12 states specified revised measures and 6 states pilot tested them. Two measures were retained from the original specifications: initiation of treatment and treatment engagement. Additional measures were focused on continuity of care after assessment, detoxification, residential or inpatient care. These data demonstrate that state agencies can calculate performance measures from routinely available information and that there is wide variability in these indicators. Ongoing research is needed to examine the reasons for these results, which might include lack of patient interest or commitment, need for quality improvement efforts, or financial issues.

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