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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
JUNE 3<sup>RD</sup>, 2009

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## **QIO Support Accelerates Hospital Improvement in Heart Care, Researchers Find**

Technical support provided by federally funded organizations operating in every state has had a substantial role in upgrading hospital care in the U.S. during a period when hospital performance improved faster than outpatient care, according to a new federal report.

The annual National Healthcare Quality Report, just released by the U.S. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), finds that essential treatment for Medicare patients with heart failure was provided 73.4% of the time in 2002, with that percentage jumping to 77.7% in 2004. From 2005 to 2006, for all payors, performance on two key heart failure measures improved from 88.4% to 90.7% for one measure, and from 82.9% to 85.2% for the other.

“The work of Quality Improvement Organizations (QIOs) contributed substantially to the rapid improvement in the Hospital Quality Alliance measures they track,” say the authors of the AHRQ report. The Hospital Quality Alliance is a national multi-stakeholder organization that promotes the use of a common set of performance measures in order to track performance at the state and provider level. The AHRQ report says the most recent data indicate that hospitals are improving on key performance measures at a rate of almost 3% a year, while care in ambulatory settings is improving by only a little more than 1% a year.

“We are very pleased that the national quality-of-care ‘snapshot’ released by AHRQ recognizes the important work the QIOs are doing to accelerate improvement on quality performance indicators important to our nation’s seniors,” said David Schulke of the American Health Quality Association, which represents QIOs in Washington DC. “While there is much more that QIOs can do to help hospitals upgrade the quality of care purchased by Medicare, this AHRQ report demonstrates that QIOs are already supporting tangible gains in important areas like management of heart failure and heart attack.”

AHRQ cites the current three-year workplan that QIOs are now embarked on as holding significant promise for making additional improvements in Medicare quality. QIO contracts with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid (CMS) run through 2011.

“New activities include work on projects that span the entire spectrum of the health community,” say the authors of the report. This includes “intensive support of providers most in need of QIO assistance, and development of a more robust monitoring framework that will track the impact QIOs are having on the quality of care provided to Medicare beneficiaries.”

The National Healthcare Quality Report 2008 is available at <http://www.ahrq.gov/qual/qrd08.htm>.