Continuous Quality Improvement

Established concepts overview

June 2026

Metro conducted preliminary research on Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI). A CQI framework includes data-driven decision-making, iterative testing, stakeholder involvement, and system-level learning over time. Within complex homeless service systems, CQI can provide a structured yet flexible approach to understanding performance and making meaningful improvements.

There are a variety of tools and practices used for quality improvement in different sectors. In this preliminary research phase, staff focused on high-level CQI concepts and details, and how they may play complimentary and reinforcing roles within a CQI framework.

To support a shared understanding of improvement approaches, the following tables illustrate how commonly used and established frameworks, methodologies and methods relate across different levels. These approaches range from broad management systems to improvement philosophies and outcome frameworks. The CQI concepts include structured methodologies, models and methods used to implement change. Together, these various approaches can play complementary and reinforcing roles within a CQI framework.

Table 1. Established CQI concepts

The concepts outlined below are organized into four categories. Some of the concepts may be categorized differently than in other sources; however, for clarity the following definitions are used for the Supportive Housing Services Regional Policy and Oversight Committee (SHS RPOC), we define them as such:

1. **Framework:** Organizes thinking and creates alignment by explaining how change, performance, or systems work. A framework provides a structure but does not prescribe steps.
2. **Methodology:** A structured approach for running improvement or performance management at scale. It defines routines, roles, and expectations.
3. **Method/cycle:** A repeatable sequence of steps used to execute improvement work.
4. **Tool/practice:** A specific technique or practice that supports analysis, learning, or execution.

Concept	Category	Primary focus
Integrated Performance Management (IPM)	Framework	Aligns strategy, performance measurement and decision making to improve outcomes across organizations
Results Based Accountability (RBA)	Framework	Improving population-level outcomes and program performance by connecting data, decision-making and accountability
Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI)	Methodology	Structured, data-driven approach for continuously improving processes and outcomes through iterative learning and testing
Lean	Methodology	Focused on eliminating waste and improving flow to maximize value for the customer
Six Sigma	Methodology	Data-driven methodology for reducing variation and defects to improve quality, consistency and process performance
Kaizen	Methodology	Hands-on improvement method focused on continuous, incremental improvements driven by frontline staff to enhance processes and outcomes
Plan-Do-Study-Act / Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDSA/PDCA)	Method/Cycle	Practical, iterative method for testing changes in real-world settings to improve processes and outcomes overtime
Model for Improvement	Method/Cycle	Accelerates improvement by defining aims, measures, and changes and applying rapid-cycle testing

Table 2. CQI concept details

Concept	What it is	Purpose	Key features	Focus	CQI function
Integrated Performance Management (IPM)	Management system	Align goals, data, and improvement	Planning, measurement, and CQI together	Results and systems	Connects CQI to system goals and performance
Results Based Accountability (RBA)	Outcome framework	Define and measure outcomes and performance	"How much, how well, better off…*, population vs. performance accountability	Outcomes	Sets shared goals and measures
Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI)	Improvement philosophy / overall improvement approach	Improve systems over time	Uses data, testing, and learning	Processes and systems	Guides ongoing improvement work
Lean	Improvement approach / structured methodology	Improve efficiency and eliminate waste	Value stream mapping, flow, waste reduction	Efficiency	Helps streamline processes
Six Sigma	Data-driven approach / structured methodology	Reduce defects and variation	Data analysis, root cause analysis, structured problem-solving	Quality and accuracy	Used for complex problems needing deep analysis
Kaizen	Improvement philosophy / improvement culture	Encourage small, daily improvements	Everyone contributes ideas	People and processes	Builds a culture that supports CQI
Plan-Do-Study-Act / Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDSA/PDCA)	Testing method	Test and refine changes	Small tests, quick learning	Learning	Used to test and improve changes
Model for Improvement	Improvement model	Guides improvement work	3 questions (aim, measures, changes) + PDSA/PDCA	Process improvement	Helps structure improvement efforts

* "How much did we do? How well did we do it? Is anyone better off?"

Next steps

Metro will continue to build on this initial work to support the Committee's developing recommendations to Metro Council. The process will remain responsive to feedback from the SHS RPOC, with opportunities for input used to refine research questions, guide analysis and inform the development of a CQI framework recommendation. This next phase will focus on gaining a deeper understanding of how different CQI approaches are implemented in practice and how they could be adapted to support a regional system.

In addition to incorporating Committee feedback, this work will include several key activities:

- **Additional research:** Further review of CQI frameworks, methodologies and best practices to better understand how different approaches are applied across sectors and systems. Further exploration could identify which combinations of approaches best support both strong outcomes and broad participation.
- **National outreach:** Engagement with practitioners in government entities and service systems across the country to learn from their CQI implementation efforts, including how systems balance structure, flexibility and scale.
- **Local landscape analysis:** Analysis of current quality improvement efforts in SHS system, including at Metro and the counties.
- **Implementation considerations:** Exploring how CQI approaches could be applied in practice across a multi-jurisdictional, multi-partner system, including factors such as training needs, staffing capacity, data availability, complex client needs, consistency across providers and alignment with system values and goals.