

Continuous Quality Improvement

National examples

June 2026

This document provides an initial review of how Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) frameworks are applied in government and homelessness service systems across the country. It's intended to establish a baseline for understanding different approaches and identifying common elements as Metro staff supports the Committee's CQI recommendation for Metro Council consideration.

In addition to reviewing published materials, Metro staff are meeting with practitioners and system leaders in other jurisdictions to learn more about how organizations design and use CQI in practice. The examples in this document draw on both published documentation and information gathered through initial outreach and engagement.

Metro staff are also examining how jurisdictions assess the relationship between CQI frameworks, system performance and outcomes. This document describes key framework components and implementation approaches rather than evaluating effectiveness. Future iterations of this work will include additional information about how jurisdictions measure and report changes in system performance and outcomes associated with CQI efforts.

Examples of CQI frameworks and approaches

Hawaii: Department of Human Services

In 2022, the Homeless Programs Office (HPO) of the Hawaii Department of Human Services implemented a CQI framework to redesign its contract monitoring system (Hawaii Department of Human Services Benefit, Employment, and Support Services Division of the Homeless Programs Office, 2025). HPO partnered with Collaborative Quality Consulting to implement the framework. The framework built on HPO's earlier transition in 2016 to performance-based management, which prioritizes measurable outcomes over compliance-focused oversight.

The CQI framework uses the Plan–Do–Study–Act (PDSA) cycle to support continuous program improvement. Key components include:

- Performance measures aligned with each program's purpose
- Standardized and streamlined data collection tools
- Simplified financial reporting processes

- Consistent CQI practice guidelines
- Reporting templates to improve timeliness and completeness
- Structured collaboration with service providers

HPO and Collaborative Quality Consulting conducted an internal review of existing monitoring tools and processes, followed by structured discussions with providers across service types (e.g., Housing First, shelters, outreach). These sessions were used to review and revise performance measures and to develop updated data collection tools, including performance dashboards, case review tools, organizational self-assessments, and CQI toolkits with guidance documents.

In 2023, HPO continued working with providers to refine the CQI system, pilot tools, and address implementation challenges. The work also included strengthening internal systems, such as the Homeless Data Integration System database, to support data tracking and improvement efforts. CQI implementation is ongoing, with full rollout targeted for July 2026.

North Carolina: City of Raleigh and Wake County

The city of Raleigh, North Carolina's 2025 Unsheltered Homelessness Response Strategy includes a CQI framework to strengthen system performance, coordination and accountability (Sagrado Strategies, Inc., 2026). The goals of this framework are to more effectively move people from unsheltered homelessness into permanent housing by supporting ongoing system improvement and helping the homelessness response adapt over time. CQI is embedded into implementation to ensure the strategy remains data-driven, outcome-focused, and responsive to changing conditions.

The framework uses performance data and stakeholder feedback to continuously improve operations and increase housing outcomes. Key components include:

- Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time-bound (SMART) goals and success measures tied to housing outcomes
- Shared data systems and a dashboard to track progress
- Plan-Do-Study-Act model and regular learning cycles
- CQI leadership and coordination structure
- Continuous refinement of tools and processes based on field and stakeholder input

Development of the CQI approach includes collaboration among the city, county, Continuum of Care (CoC), service providers, and people with lived experience of homelessness to review performance and improve tools and data systems.

CQI will play a central role in the city/county's response to homelessness. One of the three priorities in the Year One Action Plan of the Unsheltered Homelessness Response Strategy is focused on building CQI infrastructure, including leadership roles, goal setting, dashboard development, and practices for ongoing review of the system and processes.

Washington: King County

King County, Washington began using Lean as its main approach to CQI in 2011. Lean was used across the county to improve government services by helping staff identify challenges, simplify processes, and improve how work gets done. Over time, the county updated its approach to better track results and support long-term use.

Key components of their approach included:

- Staff-led efforts to find problems and improve how work is done
- Training and coaching to help staff and managers use Lean tools
- Use of Lean methods across the County to guide improvements
- Systems to track progress and results
- Tools to assess how well departments are using Lean
- Efforts to build skills within departments so improvements can last over time

At first, the County focused heavily on Lean Six Sigma training. However, it found that training alone did not always lead to real improvements (GoLeanSixSigma.com, 2017). In response, the County shifted to a more hands-on approach that focused on applying Lean tools to real work, with support from coaching and project-based learning.

Reviews by the King County Auditor between 2016 and 2019 found several areas for improvement, including the need for clearer goals, a stronger overall strategy, and better tracking of results. In response, the County clarified its goals, improved how it tracked project outcomes, and introduced a way to assess how well departments were using Lean. King County also worked to involve employees by including them in improvement projects, offering ongoing support, and recognizing early successes. This helped build skills across the organization and led to measurable improvements, such as faster processes and more efficient administrative work.

Lean initially had strong support from county leadership, but the overall focus on Lean and CQI decreased following staffing transitions. While some Lean tools and processes are still in use, the lack of consistent leadership support made it hard to maintain momentum across the whole County.

Today, remnants of Lean continue in some departments, but it is no longer a countywide effort. It is unclear what approach the County will use in the future or whether they will continue or replace its CQI work.

Federal: Department of Health and Human Services

The Youth at Risk of Homelessness (YARH) initiative, funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services from 2013 through 2028, uses CQI to improve programs designed to prevent homelessness among youth in the child welfare system. In the second phase of a multiyear grant, six grantees received funding to test and refine interventions to prevent homelessness among youth and young adults in the child welfare system (Davis & Packard Tucker, 2020). YARH highlighted two of the grantees — Alameda County, California, and the Colorado Department of Human Services — who used CQI to regularly review and adjust their programs during implementation.

In this project, CQI was used as an ongoing learning process. Teams regularly reviewed data, identified challenges, tested changes, and checked whether those changes improved results. Key components included:

- Regular data review meetings or reports (often monthly)
- Use of simple dashboards and reports tied to program goals
- Linking CQI measures to the program's theory of change
- Strong partnerships between service providers, evaluators, and public agencies
- Ongoing adjustments to the program based on data analysis

In Alameda County, CQI focused on monthly meetings where partners reviewed data and talked through implementation challenges. Over time, these discussions became more detailed and moved from basic questions like whether youth were enrolling in the program to more complex questions about whether services were delivered as intended and whether they were helping participants. CQI also helped the team look more closely at specific issues. For example, when attendance at a key program activity was lower than expected, the team used surveys to understand why and made changes, such as offering services in more convenient locations.

In Colorado, CQI was supported by a data system that produced monthly reports on program activity and outcomes. These reports were reviewed with state and local partners to track progress and make decisions. CQI findings led to important changes to the program design, such as removing parts of the model that were not being used or were duplicative, and adjusting expectations for caseload size and service intensity.

Across both sites, CQI helped teams adapt their programs over time instead of following a fixed model. This approach required strong collaboration, regular communication and a willingness to adapt as new information emerged.

The YARH project integrated CQI into program design from the start to support continuous improvement and learning about what works. The project emphasized the importance of data use, strong partnerships, and an iterative program in response to new information.

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