

Enhanced 18-Month Well-Baby Assessment an important component in primary care quality improvement plans:

new toolkit, planning guide, measurement tools online

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IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF CARE THAT ONTARIANS RECEIVE IS A CENTRAL FOCUS OF ONTARIO'S ACTION PLAN FOR HEALTH CARE.¹ THE INTRODUCTION OF QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PLANS (QIPs) TO THE PRIMARY HEALTH-CARE SECTOR BY THE ONTARIO MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND LONG-TERM CARE REPRESENTS AN IMPORTANT COMPONENT OF THE PROVINCIAL AGENDA FOR HEALTH-CARE TRANSFORMATION.

According to the Ministry, QIPs provide health-care organizations with the opportunity to advance the provincial quality agenda, and to “express their commitment to a health-care system that is patient/client centred, focused on accountability and transparency, and committed to improving the quality of care Ontarians receive.”²

Aboriginal Health Access Centres, Community Health Centres, Family Health Teams, and Nurse Practitioner-Led Clinics were required to submit a QIP to Health Quality Ontario by April 1, 2013, using the template format provided by the Ministry.

While the submission of a QIP is only mandatory for the above-mentioned primary care organizations, the Ministry encourages other primary health-care providers to incorporate QIPs into their practice on a voluntary basis.

The Ministry has identified access, integration, and patient-centred care as the priority quality dimensions for QIPs in primary care, but primary care organizations are encouraged to incorporate additional indicators, as relevant to their practice.³

Recognizing the value of QIPs in guiding continuous quality improvement practices in primary care, Kingston, Frontenac and Lennox & Addington (KFL&A) Public Health, through collaboration with Queen's Family Health Team and numerous other partners, identified the Enhanced 18-Month Well-Baby Assessment as an important component to be included in primary care QIPs.

Importance Of The Enhanced 18-Month Well-Baby Assessment

The 18-Month Well-Baby Assessment is often the last of a series of scheduled primary care visits prior to school entry.

In 2005, the Expert Panel on the 18-Month Well-Baby Visit, established by the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services, published a report entitled “Getting it Right at 18 Months ... Making it Right for a Lifetime.”⁴ As a result of recommendations made in the report from the Expert Panel, the focus of the 18-Month Well-Baby Assessment was shifted to an enhanced assessment of developmental health and progress.

The Enhanced 18-Month Well-Baby Assessment is recognized as a pivotal point at which to continue the publicly funded immunization schedule and ensure that every child is provided with a comprehensive developmental assessment.

Through the use of recommended standardized tools, such as the Rourke Baby Record, the Nipissing District Developmental Screen, and an Early Child Development and Parenting Resource Pathway, the Enhanced 18-Month Well-Baby Assessment provides health-care professionals with the opportunity to initiate broader discussions with parents regarding child development, parenting, local community programs and services, and early literacy promotion.⁵

Providing all children with a full developmental assessment at 18 months will help to identify concerns earlier, prior to school entry. This will allow families to access specialized community programs and services earlier, when they are most effective.⁵

Universal provision of the Enhanced 18-Month Well-Baby Assessment in

primary care practice will provide all children in Ontario with the opportunity to reach their full potential, and will ensure that no child is left behind.

Including The Enhanced 18-Month Well-Baby Assessment In Primary Care QIPs

As a result of enhanced understanding of the link between early child development and children's behaviour, ability to learn, and overall health and well-being throughout life, healthy child development has been identified as an important focus of population health strategies.

This is the case in Ontario, where healthy child development has been included as a key component of provincial health strategies. For example, the primary strategic goal of Ontario's Public Health Sector Strategic Plan is to optimize healthy human development, with a specific focus on early child development.⁶ The focus on early child development reflects the understanding that the first 2,000 days of a child's life are critical to long-term health, as healthy babies are more likely to grow into healthy children and adults.⁶

The 2011 Ontario Health Status Report of the Chief Medical Officer of Health also includes a focus on healthy child development.⁷ This report identifies healthy child development at school entry as one of 12 key health indicators to be monitored over time. This indicator measures the percentage of children who are "ready to learn" at the point of school entry using the Early Development Instrument (EDI).⁷

The Enhanced 18-Month Well-Baby Assessment aligns with the focus on healthy child development included in Ontario's Public Health Sector Strategic Plan and the 2011 Ontario Health Status Report. The intent of the Enhanced 18-Month Well-Baby Assessment is to provide every child with a comprehensive assessment of developmental health in order to allow physical, emotional, cognitive, or speech and language concerns to be identified and addressed earlier. This will help to advance the strategic goal of optimizing healthy human development, and offers the potential to reduce the number of

vulnerable children at school entry, as measured by EDI scores.

Improving implementation rates and the overall quality of the Enhanced 18-Month Well-Baby Assessment in primary care practice is an important step in achieving these strategic goals and ensuring that healthy child development is optimized. Appropriate health care for children at all points will maximize long-term population health benefits. Given this alignment with provincial population health strategies, as well as the fundamental role of QIPs in advancing the provincial quality agenda and guiding continuous quality improvement practices, the Enhanced 18-Month Well-Baby Assessment is an important component to be included in primary care QIPs.

Enhanced 18-Month Well-Baby Assessment QIP Toolkit

Recognizing the potential for QIPs to guide continuous quality improvement in primary care, KFL&A Public Health, through collaboration with numerous partners, developed an Enhanced 18-Month Well-Baby Assessment QIP Toolkit. The Cancer Screening QIP Toolkit developed by Cancer Care Ontario, as well as QIP templates and guidance documents from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, served as a framework in the creation of the Enhanced 18-Month Well-Baby Assessment Toolkit.⁸

The purpose of this toolkit is to provide primary care practices with the guidance and resources that are necessary to facilitate the inclusion of the Enhanced 18-Month Well-Baby Assessment in a primary care practice's QIP.

The toolkit uses the Plan, Do, Study, Act Cycle for continuous improvement (see Figure 1, p. 34), and includes a planning guide that provides primary care practices with a step-by-step process for developing a comprehensive Enhanced 18-Month Well-Baby Assessment QIP. Also included in the toolkit are three measurement tools, which are intended to provide primary care practices with a systematic method to develop a measurement plan for the QIP, routinely track the primary

care practice's progress over time, and complete an evaluation at the end of the fiscal year in preparation for submission of the final QIP report. These measurement tools establish a framework to ensure that systematic, longitudinal monitoring of the implementation and quality of the Enhanced 18-Month Well-Baby Assessment occurs in primary care practice.

Within the toolkit, the planning guide and measurement tools include practical examples of appropriate indicators for the Enhanced 18-Month Well-Baby Assessment QIP, measurement methodologies for establishing baseline performance and tracking progress over time, as well as recommended quality improvement initiatives to be implemented in practice.

In order to ensure consistency with ongoing QIPs in primary care and to help facilitate ease of inclusion of the Enhanced 18-Month Well-Baby Assessment, the toolkit includes a sample Enhanced 18-Month Well-Baby Assessment QIP using the Primary Care Quality Improvement Plan Template provided by the Ministry. In providing these resources, the toolkit is intended to enable primary care practices to include the Enhanced 18-Month Well-Baby Assessment as a core component of QIP initiatives.

The Enhanced 18-Month Well-Baby Assessment QIP Toolkit is available on the KFL&A Public Health Informatics website, which can be accessed at http://www.kflaphi.ca/?page_id=817 (click on "EWBA Quality Improvement Plan — General Version CPS").

Conclusion

The primary goal set forth in Ontario's Public Health Sector Strategic Plan is to optimize healthy human development, focusing specifically on early child development. The Enhanced 18-Month Well-Baby Assessment represents a core element of provincial efforts to optimize healthy child development that has not yet been applied at the population level.

As primary care practices strive to advance their individual quality agendas through the development of QIPs, a focus on improving the quality of ser-

vices intended to enhance healthy child development is important. Establishing a QIP for primary care specific to the Enhanced 18-Month Well-Baby Assessment provides a systematic means of ensuring that every child in Ontario is given the best start, and that no child is left behind. ■

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Figure 1
“Plan, Do, Study, Act” Framework for the Enhanced 18-Month Well-Baby Assessment Quality Improvement Plan

