

Quality Pathway Information Sheet 10

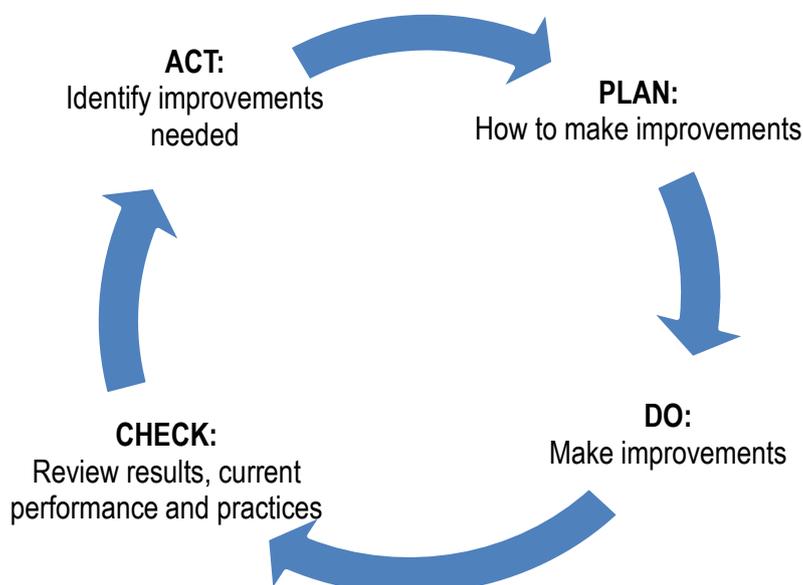
Maintaining Quality and Continuous Improvement

This Information Sheet provides an overview of continuous improvement.

Quality management does not stop with compliance against the standards. Meeting a set of standards simply establishes that a service provider has met minimum requirements. From here, a service provider should look to maintaining quality through ongoing improvement.

Once quality processes are in place, the service provider can use these processes for ongoing critical reflection and identification of areas for improvement. Service providers need to do this to ensure they are providing the best possible services now and into the future.

The 'Plan, Do, Check, Act' model of continuous improvement applies to all aspects of a provider's service delivery and operations.



PLAN: Action is planned to make improvements

Quality planning incorporates both the broader processes the organisation will undertake in its quality program as well as identifying specific areas and activities for development. For example, a broader process would be to comply with and exceed certain quality/accreditation standards. A specific area and activity may be to review the organisation's workplace relations performance, by seeking feedback from staff, comparing policy and practice with recommended and legislated practice, analysing employee related data (such as retention rates), and sharing experiences with other providers.

Planning addresses the scope, timeframes, responsibilities and resources required to implement quality processes. Quality planning is also when the organisation identifies any standards and/or other indicators which the organisation will measure its performance against; this includes legislation, industry benchmarks, guidelines and accreditation standards.

DO: Action is implemented and the improvements are made

Once the organisation has identified areas for improvement, actions are to be made to improve services and operations. Actions may include introducing or updating a policy or procedure document, providing new training for staff, implementing new information sharing protocols, or providing a new customer service to improve outcomes.

Implementing actions includes ensuring there are ways to assess the impact and effectiveness of actions, such as monitoring, data collection, and reporting mechanisms.

CHECK: Results from improvements are reviewed, in conjunction with re-assessing current practices and performance.

The organisation's activities and performance is to be reviewed in order to assess how well it is working and meeting the needs of customers. Review activities include collecting and analysing feedback from customers, staff, governing body and other stakeholders as well as measuring practice and performance against selected industry benchmarks, guidelines, accreditation standards and legislation.

ACT: In response to the results from previous action or performance, further improvements are identified and the cycle returns to the 'Plan' step once more.

Reviewing performance will identify where practice needs improvement to better meet service or operational needs and/or to meet or exceed standards. These practice improvements now form part of the organisation's quality planning and implementation action.

Part of managing quality and continuous improvement includes maintaining a record of plans for improvements, progress and achievements. These records can be used to provide direction, demonstrate commitment to quality to internal and external stakeholders, and measure success.