

In a truly patient-centric health system, patients make informed decisions based on provider and care team expertise, and also their own skills, capabilities, values, and goals. A robust patient engagement process is central to a health system that delivers on the Quadruple Aim: improved health outcomes, improved patient experiences, improved staff experiences, and reduced costs.

This Action Guide addresses the development of patient-centric care systems through two key concepts: shared decision-making and self-care.

- **Shared decision-making (SDM)** is when health care providers and patients (including caregivers) work together to make a decision that is best for the patient using the provider's clinical expertise and evidence combined with patient values and goals.¹⁵
- **Self-care support** is the assistance provided to patients, especially those with chronic conditions, which enables them to manage their health on a day-to-day basis.¹⁶

WHAT Can Health Centers Do Differently When It Comes to Patient Engagement?

A comprehensive patient engagement strategy relies on a team approach and creating an environment of empathy in the practice that is palpable to patients.¹⁷

Patients make choices based on how staff make them feel, not just the quality of care provided. An organizational approach to shared decision-making and self-management strategies has been shown to positively affect both patient and provider satisfaction.¹⁶

Patient engagement “is not trying to get patients to act in spite of their motivations, or in spite of a set of behaviors that they're not inclined to do. It's about understanding human motivation more deeply, and then channeling it [to]... enable patients to act in beneficial ways.”¹⁸

HOW to Engage Patients in Care?

Each member of the health care team should have accountability for patient engagement as part of their job role and task list. See the [Care Teams Action Guide](#). Patient engagement is everyone's responsibility.



The process of sharing in the decision-making tasks involves developing a partnership based on empathy, exchanging information about the available options, deliberating while considering the potential consequences of each one, and making a decision by consensus.¹⁹

PATIENT ENGAGEMENT ACTION STEPS:

This Action Guide provides health centers with a list of actionable steps to support and engage patients in meaningful partnerships with the health care team.

- STEP 1 Identify a Patient Engagement Lead.** Although every team member should participate, designate and train one key staff member to maintain an organizational focus on patient engagement and staff development in related skills.
- STEP 2 Establish Patient Engagement Metrics.** Collect patient feedback on their health care experiences, health care goals, and current self-care knowledge.
- STEP 3 Use Daily Huddles to Support Patient Engagement.** Implement daily huddles that include pre-visit planning and anticipate patient education and self-care needs and resources, with discussion about the ways every team member can help.
- STEP 4 Enhance Patient Communication Skills.** Communicate with patients in their language, and at their level of understanding (use the “Ask-Tell-Ask” technique) and help them set realistic expectations and steps needed to reach their goals.
- STEP 5 Provide a Written Care Plan or Visit Summary.** Provide every patient with a written visit summary or care plan after each visit.
- STEP 6 Use Patient Decision Aids.** Provide patients with decision aids that are in formats and languages appropriate for their reading level and background.
- STEP 7 Train Staff in Patient Engagement.** Train clinicians and staff on how to communicate effectively with different patient groups, how to facilitate shared decision-making, and where to find resources for patient education. Training should address differences in health beliefs, screening, care expectations, and health literacy.

STEP 1 **Identify a Patient Engagement Lead.** Designate and train a member of the staff whose role it is to maintain an organizational focus on patient engagement, including support for staff development in this area.



Action Step: Identify a staff member to be the patient engagement lead.

STEP 2 **Establish Patient Engagement Metrics.** Health care organizations focused on the Quadruple Aim need to establish at least one performance metric for the ‘patient experience’ goal. Studies show that shared decision-making improves patients’ satisfaction with, and involvement in, their health care.²⁰ At a minimum, health centers can survey patients on their experience and self-care knowledge at least annually. Review results for themes and trends that drive future improvement efforts. The American Medical Association’s (AMA) Steps Forward® Program offers a module, Building a Patient Experience Program, that shows how to build a successful patient experience program using team engagement and patient feedback.



Action Step: Administer a patient experience survey on a regular basis (at least annually).

STEP 3

Use Daily Huddles to Support Patient Engagement. Implement daily huddles that include pre-visit planning, which allows teams to anticipate care needs. This planning period frees time during the visit for providers and staff to build a collaborative partnership with patients. Care teams that participate in huddles report better teamwork and more supportive practice climates. An open and trusting atmosphere is critical to team effectiveness and improvement. See the [Leadership Action Guide](#) for steps supporting ‘psychological safety’. See also, [sample huddle checklist and tools](#). Providers who huddle also report greater self-efficacy for implementing patient-centered medical home changes.²¹



Action Step: Implement daily huddles that include pre-visit planning. Huddles should include a process for care teams to periodically assess the success of patient engagement strategies.

STEP 4

Enhance Patient Communication Skills. While successful health care organizations establish standards of care for patients, recommended care may not be realized if it is not aligned with patients’ goals, priorities, and knowledge. Care team members must become reflective listeners. Providers should set the norm that it is okay for patients to ask questions and offer suggestions to improve their own care. Studies show that a provider’s communication style can influence patients to become more active in decision-making.²² Providers can use the tools of partnership-building and supportive communication to facilitate patient involvement. Training in these skills is often required and can be supported by identifying a staff member to serve as a patient engagement lead.

As part of a patient engagement strategy, institute a formal way to ask patients what they would like to accomplish at their visit. A [Pre-Appointment Questionnaire](#) can be used at check-in with follow-up by the care team. Assessing a patient’s level of motivation for engagement, through observation and discussion, is critical before taking steps forward.

Incorporate the *Ask-Tell-Ask* method.²³ First, *Ask* for permission to share information. If permission is given, provide information (*Tell*). Consider a patient’s language and background. Share information in small bits — using pictures or graphics and decision tools. Then, *Ask* if the patient understands. See [Ask-Tell-Ask Worksheet](#) (within the ‘Resources’ tab of AMA Stepforward’s Health Coaching module) and 1 minute [ASK-TELL-ASK informational video](#). The last step, asking patients what they heard, is an approach for [Closing the Loop](#), or ‘teach back’.



Action Step: Institute formal strategies to improve the communication and reflective listening skills of each provider and team member. Consider the pre-appointment questionnaire, the “Ask-Tell-Ask” method, and a way to set/track realistic goals for patient progress.

STEP 5

Provide a Written Care Plan or Visit Summary. A key step in patient engagement, and incorporating patients as members of the care team, is to provide each patient with a written care plan or visit summary after each visit. Review existing care plan templates and visit summaries to determine if/where enhancements may be needed.

Design patient visit processes to include patient goal setting and, where appropriate, the development of an action plan. Set realistic goals and recognize that progress may involve small, incremental changes over time.²⁴ Patients should consider themselves members of their care team. Other helpful tools for engaging patients include patient education materials and instructions for patients on how to use the patient portal.



Action Step: Provide every patient with a written visit summary or care plan, including goals based on their abilities and self-care goals arrived through a process of shared decision-making. Where appropriate, include a written Action Plan and timeline for self-care.

STEP 6

Use Patient Decision Aids. Decision aids help patients engage in their care decisions and feel more satisfied with their care.^{15,25} Provide patients with decision aids in a format and language appropriate for their reading level and background. Resources can be shared during visits and via the patient portal.

A decision aid, for instance, could list the minimum set of care services and areas of clinical focus, such as diabetes management, heart health, asthma, or smoking cessation (see [Care Teams Action Guide](#)). Provide patients with the decision aid early in the visit (e.g., at check-in) so that it serves as both an informational tool for patients and a prompt for the care team.



Action Step: Create or use existing patient decision aids for each target group. Incorporate patient decision aids as part of the patient visit process.

STEP 7

Train Staff in Patient Engagement. Building a patient-centric model of care requires teamwork, open communication, and continuous learning. Training should include skills for engaging effectively with different communities and an understanding of their health beliefs, prevention approaches, and care practices. Train clinicians and staff in motivational interviewing and in how to communicate effectively with patients from different backgrounds and across a range of care decisions. Include training in the use of decision aids and where to access credible online patient education tools or referral sources. Consider the free webinar from [AHRQ's SHARE Approach](#), a five-step process for shared decision-making. CME/CE credits are available.

Build a process for regular patient engagement training and measurement as part of annual performance reviews. Organizations that offer staff access to [IHI's Open School](#) can include the 'Introduction to Patient-Centered Care' course in their training. Add accountability for patient engagement to each team member's task list. Patient engagement is everyone's responsibility.



Action Step: Update the organization's employee performance review process to measure against new job expectations and overall organizational goals.

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