



Clinical governance in aged care

Toolkit Developing and implementing a clinical governance framework

This is part of a series of resources about clinical governance in aged care that aim to help aged care providers meet their responsibilities for ensuring the quality and safety of clinical care.

This fact sheet is for people responsible for developing a clinical governance framework for an aged care service.¹

It describes the steps that should be taken when developing and implementing a clinical governance framework for an aged care service that does not already have one. These steps can also be applied by aged care services that already have a clinical governance framework to review their existing clinical governance arrangements and identify areas for improvement.



How can you use this tool?

Under Standard 8 Requirement (3)(e) of the Aged Care Quality Standards you need to demonstrate that you have a clinical governance framework in place that guides the clinical care delivered in your service. Clinical governance is a broad concept covering a wide range of processes that are relevant to different members of your workforce in different ways across your service. While you are likely to have had many of the elements of clinical governance in place in your service for some time, you may not have brought them together into a single framework that has the clear purpose of ensuring safe, quality clinical care and good clinical outcomes for consumers.

This resource provides information about the steps you can take to develop and implement a clinical governance framework for your service. It should be used with other parts of this toolkit, including:

- Organisational self-assessment tool 1: Aged care service and consumers
- Organisational self-assessment tool 2: Clinical governance arrangements
- Clinical governance framework guide.

Clinical governance is an integrated set of leadership behaviours, policies, procedures, responsibilities, relationships, planning, monitoring and improvement mechanisms that are implemented to support safe, quality clinical care and good clinical outcomes for each consumer.

The **purpose** of clinical governance is to support the workforce and visiting practitioners in your service to provide safe, quality clinical care as part of an holistic approach to aged care that is based on the needs, goals and preferences of consumers.

Clinical care is health care that encompasses the prevention, treatment and management of illness or injury, as well as the maintenance of psychosocial, mental and physical wellbeing.

1 Clinical governance should be included in the broader corporate governance arrangements of providers of residential care, home care, short-term restorative care, transition care, as well as Multi-Purpose Service Program services and National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Flexible Aged Care Program services. Commonwealth Home Support Program services that deliver clinical care should also include clinical governance in their corporate governance arrangements. Commonwealth Home Support Program services that do not deliver clinical care do not need to have a clinical governance framework.

Clinical governance framework

A clinical governance framework describes the approach of your organisation to ensuring the quality and safety of clinical care for consumers. It is a way for everyone working in your service to understand their role, share responsibility and be accountable for ensuring clinical quality and safety.

A clinical governance framework underpins action to support good clinical outcomes for consumers. It should apply at several levels in your service: setting the strategic direction for clinical quality and safety; referring to the organisational structure, policies and procedures that will operationalise the strategic direction; and describing the roles and responsibilities of individuals responsible for implementing the strategic direction and providing and overseeing the delivery of clinical care. It should be supported by additional plans, policies and processes that provide more detail about specific strategies and activities.

The content, format and presentation of a clinical governance framework will vary depending on the specific characteristics of each aged care service. A home care service where the clinical care is limited to wound dressing and prompting consumers who are generally well to take their medication is likely to have a simpler clinical governance framework than a residential service caring for consumers with advanced chronic health conditions which may include dementia. Nonetheless, there are core elements that should be in all clinical governance frameworks.

Core elements for all clinical governance frameworks

- A statement from leaders about organisational culture and commitment to the quality and safety of clinical care
- How the aged care service applies clinical governance, and its goals for clinical quality and safety for its consumers
- Roles, responsibilities and organisational structure for the quality and safety of clinical care
- High level actions and strategies for implementing clinical governance
- Measures of success in clinical governance and clinical quality and safety
- Processes for reviewing the clinical governance framework
- References to plans, policies and procedures and other documents or systems that support the clinical governance framework and achievement of safe, quality clinical care

Developing a clinical governance framework

If you do not already have a clinical governance framework in place, the following steps provide guidance about what you can do to develop one.

Step 1: Establish organisational arrangements for developing and implementing the clinical governance framework

Because clinical governance should be embedded in the way your service provides aged care to consumers, the development of your clinical governance framework is a key organisational process. You will need to:

- Clarify the roles of your governing body² and senior executive in clinical governance and secure their commitment to the quality and safety of clinical care
- Identify an executive sponsor who is responsible and accountable for the development and implementation of the clinical governance framework
- Engage with your workforce³ and visiting practitioners to gain their input about clinical governance to develop a shared understanding about the quality and safety of clinical care the service is committed to providing, clarify roles and responsibilities for providing this care, and ensuring organisational support for providing this level of care

- Have ongoing communication with your workforce and visiting practitioners, and give them the opportunity to provide formal and informal feedback to the development process.

Step 2: Understand your service and consumers

The nature of your service and the clinical needs of your consumers will influence your arrangements for clinical governance. Aspects of your service that you need to have knowledge of include:

- How your consumers access clinical care
- The characteristics, needs and clinical risks of your consumers
- Who delivers clinical care, including interactions with visiting and external health practitioners.

Clinical governance framework toolkit:

The *Organisational self-assessment tool 1: Aged care service and consumers* will help you understand the nature of your service and consumers, and the implications for your clinical governance arrangements and clinical governance framework

2 The governing body is the individual or group of people with overall responsibility and ultimate accountability for the organisation. This includes responsibility for the strategic and operational decisions that affect the quality and safety of care and services.

3 In this fact sheet the term 'workforce' applies to all personnel who are employed or contracted by an aged care service. This includes health practitioners, staff who provide personal care, and staff who have an indirect role in providing care to consumers.

Step 3: Understand what is already in place

You may already have clinical governance elements in place, but have not brought them together into a clinical governance framework. You need to consider whether:

- There is an organisational culture that supports and encourages the workforce and visiting practitioners to provide safe, quality clinical care
- The needs, goals and preferences of consumers guide clinical care
- There are policies, processes and systems that support clinical quality and safety
- There are processes for measuring and reporting on clinical quality and safety performance
- The workforce understand their roles and are able to deliver safe, quality clinical care
- There are effective relationships with visiting practitioners and external providers.

Clinical governance framework toolkit:

The *Organisational self-assessment tool 2: Clinical governance arrangements* will help you understand what clinical arrangements you already have in place, and where there are gaps and opportunities for improvement

Step 4: Write your clinical governance framework

The Clinical governance framework guide provides a guide to the structure and content of a clinical governance framework (although you may wish to use a different model). The guide includes seven sections:

1. Introduction
2. Clinical quality and safety and clinical governance
3. Roles and responsibilities
4. Implementation of clinical governance
5. Measures of success
6. Review of the clinical governance framework
7. Related documents that support the clinical governance framework and achievement of clinical quality and safety.

Clinical governance framework toolkit:

The *Clinical governance framework guide* provides a suggested structure and content for a clinical governance framework that can be used and adapted by your service

Use of the self-assessment tools to develop the clinical governance framework will also identify clinical governance gaps that you will need to address to ensure clinical quality and safety. The gaps may take some time and effort to address, and should not prevent the development of a clinical governance framework based on what exists already, noting the actions that will be taken to address the gaps.

While the size and scope of your clinical governance framework will vary depending on the circumstances of your service, it does not need to be a long document. The purpose of the clinical governance framework is to describe the overall organisational approach to ensuring clinical quality and safety for your consumers; it does not need to go into detail about specific strategies and actions that will be taken to achieve this.

Standard 8 Requirement (3)(e) of the Quality Standards notes three specific issues that should be included in a clinical governance framework: antimicrobial stewardship, minimising the use of restraint and open disclosure. These should be noted or referred to in your clinical governance framework.

Implementing and reviewing a clinical governance framework

The purpose of clinical governance is to support the workforce and visiting practitioners in your service to provide safe, quality clinical care in partnership with consumers and their representatives; the clinical governance framework is the document that summarises the approach that will be taken in your service to achieve this. To have a positive impact on clinical quality and safety, and improve outcomes for consumers, the clinical governance framework needs to be implemented, and regularly reviewed to ensure that it remains up to date and useful.

Implementation of the actions in the clinical governance framework will involve direct engagement with the more detailed plans, policies and procedures underpinning the framework. Implementation may involve one-off projects or activities to address clinical governance gaps or establish new processes for clinical quality and safety (such as development of a measurement and reporting framework for clinical quality and safety). Implementation will also involve ongoing processes that need to be continuously maintained and reviewed to ensure that they are functioning effectively, and having the outcome that is intended (such as use of a comprehensive risk management system that includes clinical quality and safety risks).

Ongoing monitoring and review of clinical quality and safety is a core part of clinical governance. This should be linked with review processes about the effectiveness and suitability of the clinical governance framework.



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