TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Health Quality Fund (HQF) competition aims to foster physician-led, interdisciplinary clinical quality improvement (QI) projects within the Department of Medicine (DoM). These projects should advance patient and/or health-care provider outcomes, safety, experience, sustainability, and operational efficiency.

The competition provides seed funding to support project initiation and early implementation over 12–18 months, enabling teams to generate preliminary or pilot data that may inform and support future project spread.

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Objectives

- Improve measurable aspects of care, e.g., enhance clinical outcomes, processes, patient experience, and provider well-being through evidence-based QI initiatives.
- Build QI capability among physicians and interprofessional teams by applying QI methodologies, e.g., Model for Improvement, PDSA.
- Align projects with department and health organization(s) priorities, generate insights informing scalable improvements across sites [hospital/clinic], programs and units.
- Generate and share learnings, e.g., grand rounds, posters, manuscripts.

Funding Priorities and Criteria

Preference will be given to projects that promote interdisciplinary collaboration and to Department of Medicine members in the early stages of their careers (within seven years of initial appointment). Applications from all career stages are welcome and will be considered.

Funds are intended for new QI initiatives and should not supplement existing research-funded programs. Exclusions include projects that have already received funding, as well as those supported by the Kaye Competition Foundation and the MSI Foundation.

HQ Topics

The project's purpose should:

- improve a specific practice, process, or program within a given institution/facility, or
- ensure alignment with established best practices, and
- consider sustainable health-care concepts to advance planetary health goals.

The project should examine existing services and processes, as well as patient outcomes, and attempt to improve those processes and outcomes. A proposed project's scope may contain any of the following (pre-QI or QI) or a combination of the two:

Pre-QI (to inform QI) Topic Ideas

- Scoping review
- Chart review

Quality Improvement (QI) Topic Ideas

- Reducing unnecessary tests or treatments, e.g., Choosing Wisely Recommendations
- Improving medication safety
- Enhancing patient flow
- Reducing hospital-acquired conditions
- Improving timeliness of care or access to care

- Patient experience and engagement
- Equity in care delivery, e.g., address disparities in access to specialty care for rural or Indigenous patients
- Sustainability and environmental impact, e.g., reduce waste in clinical processes such as single-use items or energy use
- Digital health integration, e.g., virtual, telehealth
- Staff well-being and workflow efficiency

Maximum Value: $100,000

The DoM HQF will operate for one year and undergo re-evaluation. The fund will distribute $100,000 to successful applicants:

- Up to three (3) grants of $30,000 max.
- Up to one (1) grant of $10,000 max.

Competition Deadline

Sunday, February 8, 2026 @11:59 p.m. MT.

Eligibility

To apply for this competition:

- The Principal Investigator (PI) or Lead is primarily appointed in the Department of Medicine, University of Alberta. Preference will be given to early-career faculty (up to seven years of their initial appointment date), however, all career stages will be considered.
- The PI or Lead must be eligible to apply for and hold research funding at the University of Alberta, as per the UAPPOL.
- Learners (e.g., fellows, residents, graduate students) require a faculty sponsor to co-lead.
- Interprofessional teams are encouraged.
- Project scope includes initiation or early implementation of clinical QI, using QI methodology (e.g., PDSA, Lean, Model for Improvement, Donabedian structure–process–outcome).
- Ethics/operational approvals are required, for example:
    - operational approval
    - complete ARECCI screening tool
    - consult local guidance for REB requirements if generalizable research is intended.
- Projects must consider equity concerns, proactively mitigate potential risks and unexpected outcomes, and adhere to privacy and data-sharing requirements as applicable.
- Funding is limited to one project per individual per funding cycle.

Application Process

- A complete application form must be submitted with the requested supporting documentation in a single PDF format to the DoM HQF Committee.
- Applicants can request up to $30,000, however, whether they receive $30,000 or $10,000 will depend on the ranking among the applicants based on the objective assessment formula (see below for the scoring rubric, under Review Process section).
- If there are several strong applications, the DoM may elect to split the total fund amount at the discretion of the HQF Committee.
- **Limit**: One project per individual per cycle
- **Duration**: One-year funding period
- Applications that are either: a) incomplete or b) non-compliant, may not be forwarded for review/funding consideration.

Application Package

Your application should be simple (10 pages max., double-spaced, 12-point font) and include:

1. **Application form**
2. **Abstract** (250 words max.)
3. **Proposal** (4 pages max.)
    a. Background: local challenge, patient population and justification of importance.
    b. Aim and measurement plan including key process, outcome, and balancing measures.
    c. Interdisciplinary team: detail the health quality team consisting of clinicians/administrators and/or staff who will compose the core project team, as well as a partnership and engagement plan.
    d. Anticipated risks, mitigation plan, benefits the project will have for the section(s) involved, e.g., Department of Medicine, health system, patients, providers, etc.
    e. Include the perspective of patients as appropriate
4. **Figures, charts and graphs** (1 page max.)
5. **References** (1 page max., as a separate document and does not count toward the 4-page limit for the proposal)
6. **Budget/budget justification** (1 page max.)
7. **Condensed CV** (3 pages max.)
8. **A Signature of Support** from the relevant section head(s) and AHS executive director

Application Deadline

Sunday, February 8, 2026 at 11:59 p.m. (MT)

Click here for the Application Form

Review Process and Scoring

All complete and compliant applications will be evaluated by the HQ Committee comprised of:

- DoM QI scientist (non-voting member)
- Two DoM HQ researchers
- One researcher external to the DoM
- One ad hoc researcher (internal or external to the DoM)

Peer Review Process

1. Two independent reviewers per application
2. Conflicts managed
3. Consensus meeting to finalize successful applications

Scoring Rubric (100 points)

1. **Significance and alignment (20).**
   Clear problem statement aligned to Department/AHS priorities; HQ dimensions indicated.
2. **Aims and measures (15).**
   Specific, measurable aims; appropriate outcome, process and balancing measures.
3. **Methodology and data plan (10).**
   Model for Improvement/PDSA; driver diagram; feasibility; risk mitigation; data collection and analysis plan.
4. **Team and partners engagement plan (10).**
   Interprofessional team; patient partner(s); clear roles and governance, impact to patient and/or health-care providers.
5. **Feasibility and resources (10).**
   Realistic timeline; access to data/IT; budget appropriateness.
6. **Innovation and scalability (10).**
   Novel approach or adaptation; potential spread across units/sites; impact to health outcomes.
7. **Sustainability (10).**
   Plan for sustaining gains; ownership; policy/standard work.
8. **Risk, ethics and governance (5).**
   Privacy, safety, equity risks managed; approvals identified.
9. **Dissemination and learning (5).**
   Plan for sharing, capacity building, and departmental learning.
10. **Career stage (5).**
    - Early investigators (up to 7 years) = 5 points; 0 for subsequent years
    - Mid-senior career investigators (higher than 7 years) with previous academic productivity = 5 points

The exact amount may be less than the requested funds and will be decided by the HQ Committee based on the grant objective, grant score and funding availability.

Notification and Acceptance

Competition Results

- Successful applicants will be notified by **Friday, February 20, 2026**
- Official result letters and competition feedback will be emailed to all the applicants.

Acceptance and Implementation

- To accept the funds, the recipient must sign a legally binding agreement with the DoM and relevant section. The template for this agreement will be sent to the successful applicant at the time of notification. **This agreement must be signed, dated, and returned within two weeks of receipt.**
- Account requirements must be completed in accordance with the timelines stipulated in the formal offer of funding letter.
- Implementation requirements include account set-up according to the Research Services Office guidelines to facilitate the DoM's reception of an advice notice.
- **Funds will be deposited by Tuesday, March 31, 2026**, or as soon as the required ethics has been completed (ARECCI, organizational approval, or REB).
- Funds must be used as approved. Changes require written permission.
- Unspent funds will revert to the DoM unless an extension has been approved.

Use of Funds

These funds are intended to cover expenses such as:

A. **Analytical Support:** for acquiring analytical tools and resources necessary for data analysis and interpretation, ensuring robust measurement and analysis of quality improvement metrics.
B. **Project Management Support:** includes project coordination, planning, and oversight of quality improvement initiatives.
C. **Partnership Engagement:** for conducting partnership meetings, workshops, or focus groups aimed at engaging relevant partners in the quality improvement process.
D. **Chart Audit Work:** to facilitate chart audits and data collection activities necessary for assessing current practices, identifying areas for improvement, and measuring progress towards quality improvement goals.
E. **Training and Education:** to provide training and education opportunities for health-care providers and staff involved in the quality improvement initiative, e.g., workshops, seminars, or online training courses focused on quality improvement methodologies and best practices.
F. **Technology Infrastructure:** to invest in technology infrastructure necessary for data collection, analysis, and reporting.
G. **Quality Improvement Tools and Resources:** to acquire quality improvement tools and resources, such as measurement instruments, survey tools, and evidence-based guidelines, to support the implementation of quality improvement interventions.

H. **Patient and Community Engagement:** to support patient and community engagement activities, including patient surveys, focus groups, and community outreach initiatives aimed at incorporating patient perspectives into the quality improvement process.
I. **Evaluation and Monitoring:** for evaluation and monitoring activities to assess the impact and effectiveness of quality improvement interventions.
J. **Continuous Improvement Initiatives:** to support ongoing continuous improvement efforts, including the implementation of feedback mechanisms, performance monitoring, and iterative refinement of quality improvement strategies based on lessons learned.

Acknowledgement and Logo

Recipients are required to acknowledge the Department of Medicine's support in all project-related dissemination activities, including publications, posters, presentations, and reports.

Example Acknowledgement Statements

- *This work was supported by funding from the Department of Medicine, University of Alberta.*
- *This project was funded by the Department of Medicine Health Quality Fund, University of Alberta.*
- *We gratefully acknowledge funding support from the Department of Medicine, University of Alberta.*
- *Supported by the Department of Medicine, University of Alberta*.

Logos

U of A Logo (green)

U of A Logo (white)

U of A Logo (black)

The logos are also available at: https://www.ualberta.ca/en/department-of-medicine/about-us/scic/health-quality-fund.html

Reporting

The projects must be completed within a year, at which point the Principal Investigator or Lead must complete and submit a report.

The report should include a summary of the HQ conducted, data, the significance of the results, and any publications or presentations completed or underway.

If the work involved is extended beyond a year, interim updates may be requested.

Report Deadline: May 15, 2027

Download the HQF Final Report Template

Inquiries

DoM Health Quality Committee

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