



*For Immediate Release: December 21, 2015  
Boston, MA*

Contact: Jim Courtemanche, [jcourtemanche@mhqp.org](mailto:jcourtemanche@mhqp.org)

## Massachusetts Health Quality Partners to Study Geographic Variation in Health Care Costs and Quality

Why do health care quality and cost outcomes vary - in some cases quite widely - from state to state, region to region, and even within the same city? A five-year study of four states may create a national model to help understand the characteristics of a region or state that contribute to better health care at lower costs.

The study, funded by the U.S. Agency for Healthcare Quality and Research (AHRQ), will tap into extensive information - insurance claims, patient-experience data, and other qualitative information - readily available in four regional health improvement collaboratives (RHICs) to identify which health care delivery systems in a region or state delivers high quality, affordable care.

One of those states is Massachusetts. Massachusetts Health Quality Partners (MHQP) is partnering with the National Bureau of Economic Research, Harvard University, the Network for Regional Healthcare Improvement, and three other states: Colorado, Oregon, and Utah to understand why geographic variation happens and how states can learn from each other.

"With our four state partners, we'll be able to dive deeply into cost and quality data to identify variations within and between geographic areas. But we will also be able to understand why these variations occur. For example, the state partners can help us understand the impact of regional payment models, delivery systems, formal or informal contracting arrangements, local and state leadership, politics, and cultural norms on high quality, affordable care," explained Dr. David Cutler, a professor of applied economics at Harvard University and the principal investigator for this ground-breaking effort. Dr. Cutler served in the administration of former President Bill Clinton and was the senior health care advisor to President Obama. "This type of insight is fundamental for fixing the health care system."

Increasingly, federal health care programs, such as Medicare and Medicaid as well as private employer health plans want cost, quality and patient experience to drive health care decisions and purchases. Data are crucial in achieving impartial evaluation of delivery systems. However, quantitative data do not provide the full explanation of variation.

"MHQP has been collaborating with our stakeholders to measure and report the quality of healthcare in Massachusetts for over 20 years," notes Barbra Rabson, President and CEO of MHQP. "We have a unique understanding of the various marketplaces in

Massachusetts, their histories, how they are structured, and how that in turn impacts quality and cost outcomes."

Elizabeth Mitchell, president and CEO of the Network of Regional Healthcare Improvement, a national network of 40 regional collaboratives, including the four partners in this project, explained, "This project is an incredibly important opportunity to showcase the unique capabilities of regional collaboratives and their ability to explain their markets quantitatively and qualitatively. Perhaps the most exciting aspect is how those regional entities can inform the national research agenda."

For more information about this study, contact Jim Courtemanche, MHQP Director of Data Analytic Applications & Reporting at [jcourtemanche@mhqp.org](mailto:jcourtemanche@mhqp.org).