

## THE INITIATIVE

The SQM project was designed as a participatory, collaborative effort between key stakeholders, the National Departments of Health and Social Development, the Central Drug Authority, universities, and substance abuse service provider programmes. It will help to increase the capacity of existing national efforts, including the Department of Social Development's initiative to develop norms and standards for substance abuse treatment services and related efforts to register and accredit substance abuse treatment services as part of the Prevention of and Treatment for Substance Abuse Act (No. 70, 2008). The initiative is managed by the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Research Unit of the Medical Research Council (Cape Town). Expert advice is readily available from US consultants.

The SQM initiative will develop, pilot, and implement a small set of Service Quality Measures for South Africa's substance abuse treatment programmes. These measures will address service effectiveness, efficiency, accessibility and quality. It will have a special focus on the extent to which HIV risk is addressed within substance abuse services. This is important, given the strong links between substance use and sexual risk behaviours, as well as findings that individuals with substance use disorders are particularly vulnerable to HIV.

The initiative was launched in November 2008, when a Steering Committee of key stakeholders was formed. Since then, this Steering Committee has identified five principal goals for the South African substance abuse treatment system and established a set of indicators that can be used to measure the progress made with every goal.

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Measuring Up to Excellence in Substance Abuse Care



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# IMPROVING SUBSTANCE ABUSE TREATMENT SERVICES IN SOUTH AFRICA:

*The service quality measures (SQM) project*

## THE GOAL

By developing a platform of **Service Quality Measures** that assess the performance of substance abuse treatment programmes, this initiative seeks to guide national substance abuse treatment policies; service planning and delivery; and service improvement. The proposed platform is a much-needed addition to substance abuse treatment services in South Africa.

Even though the focus of the current project is on establishing an evidence-based approach for improving substance abuse treatment services, the outcome can readily be applied to a broad range of human services, such as HIV and AIDS management and care; child welfare and mental health, to name but a few. The team of researchers involved in the SQM project are confident that the ultimate impact of Service Quality Measures will extend well beyond the field of substance abuse. It will also provide an important tool for improving services in the social development as well as health sectors.

## WHY SERVICE QUALITY MEASURES?

Performance measures of service quality hold much value for policy makers, service planners, service providers, and clients:

- For **policy makers**, Service Quality Measures can provide information that can inform national treatment policies.
- For **service planners**, information on the performance of a particular programme can be used to guide decision-making around the distribution of limited resources, directions for new funding and future activities.
- For **service providers**, information on service quality will be useful for guiding decisions about the strategic direction of the programme. For example, performance measures can be used to increase the public's understanding of particular services and how these services may be better managed to perform effectively.
- For **clients** of treatment services, information on service quality will allow clients to make informed decisions about where to seek treatment and which services best meet their needs.



Yet, despite the high levels of substance abuse in South Africa and concerns about service effectiveness, substance abuse treatment programmes currently do not collect data on the quality of services provided.

## SQM Website

Go to <http://sqm.mrc.ac.za/>

This site contains information on the following topics:

- Background information
- Upcoming meetings
- Glossary of terms
- Domains and measures / indicators for the SQM project
- Structure of the project (workgroups)
- Project documents and resources
- Newsletter
- Links to similar initiatives internationally and links to substance abuse services / organisations in South Africa