



Tips and Tools for Learning Improvement

Aim Statements

What is an aim statement?

To do improvement, you need to set aims. Without a clear aim statement, your organization will have a difficult time coming to consensus about what needs to be done to improve, allocating people and resources needed to accomplish the aim, and measuring whether improvement has occurred.

A good aim statement answers the following questions:

- What outcome or process needs to be improved?
Must be able to measure.
- For whom will it improve? *Specify the population.*
- How much will it improve? *Set a target.*
- When will it improve? *Determine a timeframe.*
- What tool, method, resource or system will we use to make the change?

How to develop an improvement aim

Start to develop an improvement aim by thinking about what you are wanting to accomplish. Aims often talk about improvement in terms of an increase or decrease in a certain area. For example:

- Reduce the number of maternal deaths in my health care facility.
- Increase the number of children vaccinated in my health care facility.

Then, work on creating an aim statement that is as specific as possible and can be measured. The main questions that the aim statement should address include:

- **What?** – What is the outcome or process you are trying to change? This may be an increase or a decrease in a particular clinical or organizational factor. Examples include “to increase the percent of women receiving oxytocin within 3 minutes of delivery,” “to increase the number of children under 5 years with up to date vaccines in my health care facility.”
- **For whom?** – What is the target population or group for whom we are trying to improve care? This can encompass the population served by a facility or a geographic location and/or a target population. For example, an answer to “for whom” might be “All pregnant women in Rural Health Center A” or “Children under the age of 5 in the catchment of Hospital Z.”
- **How much?** – Provide clear measurable targets for the amount of improvement you expect to see (e.g., percentage increase)
- **By when?** – Provide a clearly defined timeframe for how much improvement you expect to see and by when. Setting a timeframe helps motivate the teams to keep up momentum for the improvement. The timeframe should be realistic, but not allow a team to put off making improvements. Based on the topic, your timeframe might be “by next week” or “within 6 months.”
- **Guidance** on how the aim will be achieved should be provided, when known. For example, what tool, method or resource will be used to make the change (e.g., implementation of existing norms according to guidelines, etc.)? Providing this information is helpful, but may not be available for every area you are trying to improve. It is not one of the essential components of an aim statement, but a helpful one.

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Examples of strong aim statements

Below are examples of strong and not strong aim statements

Not strong aim statement

We will have more pregnant women attend antenatal care.

We will increase HIV-positive patients screened for TB.

Strong aim statement

Health Center X will improve the percentage of women attending ANC during their 1st trimester from 25% to 80% in the next 12 months.

We will improve the percentage of HIV-positive patients who are screened for TB from 20% to 60% in 10 health care facilities in 3 provinces in the next 12 months.

Exercise 1: Recognizing a strong aim statement

For each topic area, check the box next to the strongest aim statement.

Topic area	Aim statement 1	Aim statement 2	Aim statement 3
Maternal Health	<input type="checkbox"/> Our clinic will improve the number of women coming in for antenatal care visits before the end of this year.	<input type="checkbox"/> Within 8 months, our clinic will increase the percent of women coming in for 4 antenatal care clinics to 90%	<input type="checkbox"/> Our clinic will improve the percent of women coming in for 4 antenatal care visits within 8 months.
Child Health	<input type="checkbox"/> In our clinic, we will increase the percent of children diagnosed with malaria and receiving treatment to 100% within 6 months.	<input type="checkbox"/> In our clinic, 100% of children diagnosed with malaria will receive treatment in a timely manner before October.	<input type="checkbox"/> In our clinic, health care providers will give malaria treatment to all children every time they come in for a check-up between now and October.
Family Planning	<input type="checkbox"/> We will increase the number of women and partners who receive family planning counseling after delivery to 100 per month within 6 months.	<input type="checkbox"/> In our clinic, we will decrease the unmet need for family planning among post-partum women by having providers counsel all post-partum women in family planning.	<input type="checkbox"/> In our clinic, we will increase the percent of women and partners receiving post-partum counseling on family planning before discharge to 75% with 10 months.

Exercise 2: Identifying missing elements

For the following aim statements, identify which criteria for a good aim is missing:

Remember, a strong aim statement clearly spells out:

- **What?** The outcome you are trying to change
- **For whom?** The target group for whom you are improving care
- **How much?** How much improvement you expect to see
- **By when?** A time frame by when you expect to see the improvement

Statement

What is missing?

Increase the percentage of women who received post-partum family planning counseling at the health center before their discharge from maternity by September 2016.

Outcome Target group How much By when

Increase from 50% to 80% screening for anemia according to the antenatal care standards by September 2016.

Outcome Target group How much By when

Increase by 20% the proportion of pregnant women with severe pre-eclampsia or eclampsia receiving the 1st dose of MgSO₄ before transfer to reduce the mortality associated with eclampsia.

Outcome Target group How much By when

Improve by 50% health of children under five by September 2016.

Outcome Target group How much By when

Exercise 3: Developing an aim statement

Case scenario

The head of Rural Health Center 3, Dr. Samson, was informed by his district manager that the health center needed to address poor nutritional status of HIV-positive clients attending the ART clinic. Dr. Samson was aware that his clinic had a number of challenges to overcome: an already overstretched care team, members of the team who did not appreciate the importance of good nutrition in HIV care, and high patient load. The improvement team put together by Dr. Samson decided that the first process they should improve is to assess and categorize the nutritional status of all HIV clients using middle-upper arm circumference (MUAC) measurement. This would enable providers to identify malnourished clients and be able to treat and support them, which would lead to their improved nutritional status. They hoped to achieve full coverage of all HIV clients within 6 months.

Develop an aim statement for Dr. Samson's project by answering the questions below:

Instructions

Fill in the blanks below and then use the resulting information to form an aim statement.

Where will your change be implemented: (A) _____

(A location such as a town, clinic, or office)

What process are we trying to change: (B) _____

(Should be a tangible result, such as a decrease or increase in something that matters in health care)

By what amount are we trying to change it: (C) _____

(Should be a percentage or some other numerical value)

When do you expect to see this this result happen: (D) _____

(An amount of time or by a certain date)

What will you do/use to achieve this result: (E) _____

(What intervention, method, tool, or resource will you employ to make the change?)

Complete the aim statement for Dr. Samson's improvement project:

In (A) _____ we will (B) _____

by (C) _____ within/by (D) _____

through (E) _____ .