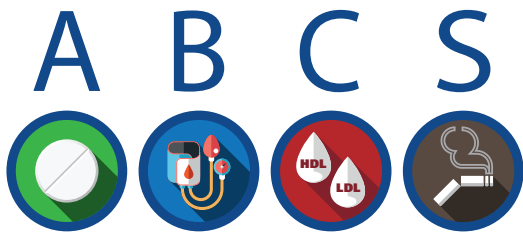


BRIDGING RESEARCH & PRACTICE IN PRIMARY CARE



What is EvidenceNOW: Advancing Heart Health?

The U.S. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) made one of its biggest investments in primary care in 2015 with *EvidenceNOW: Advancing Heart Health*, a \$112 million project that accelerated the use of evidence to improve the delivery of primary care and heart health services. The multi-State initiative worked closely with 1,500 small- and medium-sized primary care practices to enhance their ability to more effectively—and quickly—implement evidence-based care to better serve their 8 million patients.



Through the initiative, the practices received customized support to improve the delivery of services proven to prevent heart attacks and strokes. This included the “ABCS” of heart health: **A**spirin use by high-risk individuals, **B**lood pressure control, **C**holesterol management, and **S**moking cessation. Participating practices were found to improve heart health services at significantly greater rates than a comparison group of practices. **The knowledge gained about practice support is being used to develop a blueprint to improve primary care practice and save lives across America.**



Why EvidenceNOW is Important

Primary care is the backbone of the Nation’s healthcare system and how most people receive healthcare. But this backbone is under stress in the face of increasing clinical and administrative demands. Such pressures worsen a fundamental problem: **it takes many years for new evidence to make its way into clinical practice.** *EvidenceNOW: Advancing Heart Health* worked with small- and medium-sized primary care practices to reduce this research-to-practice delay for heart disease, the leading cause of death in the United States.

“Practice facilitators built relationships with practices that continue to have a positive impact now that they have to work virtually during COVID-19. The need for extension services is real and palpable.”

*Sam Cykert, M.D.
Principal Investigator, EvidenceNOW
North Carolina Cooperative*

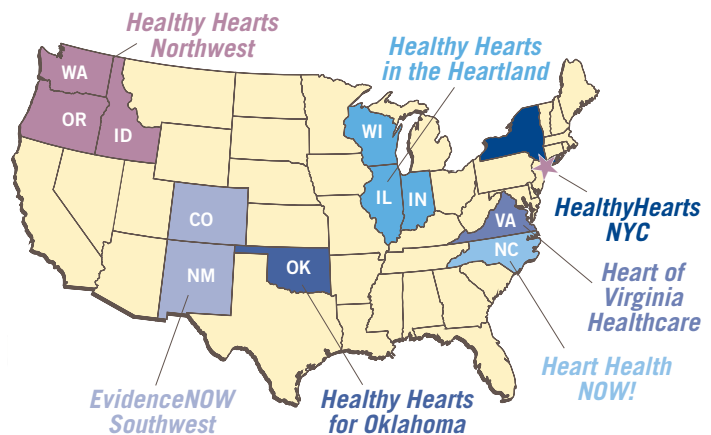


Supporting Practice Improvement

AHRQ works to build bridges between research and practice. Under *EvidenceNOW: Advancing Heart Health*, teams of experts from seven regional cooperatives—comprising academic research centers and primary care quality improvement organizations—worked with primary care practices in 12 States. Each cooperative helped their participating primary care practices incorporate new evidence into practice. The practice improvement activities specifically aimed to help practices boost the number of patients receiving the ABCS services.

Practice improvement teams tailored their support to the needs of each practice, helping the practices:

- **Use evidence** to enhance patient care and practice capabilities
- **Optimize** electronic health record (EHR) use
- **Prevent** clinician burnout
- **Improve** patients' health.



EvidenceNOW Support

Through *EvidenceNOW: Advancing Heart Health*, teams of practice facilitators—healthcare professionals who assist primary care practices in quality improvement and research activities—provided guidance and other practice improvement support to the 1,500 participating practices. The support they provided helped practices evaluate their practice improvement interventions and improve their capacity for quality improvement. Lessons learned from the practices served as a model of how to quickly translate evidence into effective, high-quality primary care.

In addition to **practice coaching**, the cooperatives provided **health information technology support**, **shared learning collaboratives**, provided **expert consultation**, and used **data, feedback and benchmarking** to support practice improvement.





Measuring Success

Each cooperative evaluated the success of its practice improvement services. Additionally, an independent national evaluation is examining the impact of interventions on practice improvement and the delivery of heart healthcare. The national evaluation is providing information about which practice support services and quality improvement strategies are most effective in increasing the implementation of new evidence.



Results

Despite challenges—such as facing a more chaotic primary care landscape than anticipated—*EvidenceNOW: Advancing Heart Health* demonstrated promising results with practices participating in the initiative. **Preliminary findings showed that participating practices improved heart health services and outcomes at significantly greater rates than a comparison group of practices, including:**

- A **10.9%** increase in smoking screening and cessation counseling
- A **6.7%** improvement in prescribing aspirin for eligible patients
- A **6.3%** increase in cholesterol management
- A **2.8%** increase in blood pressure control – an important finding, given decreasing national rates of blood pressure control.

The EvidenceNOW model of external support also boosted the capacity of primary care practices to improve quality of care and advance heart health. For example:

- Practices across the Cooperatives dramatically increased the number of quality improvement strategies used to improve care.
- In almost every Cooperative, practices with lower baseline quality improvement capacity made larger improvements than practices that started with higher capacity.

“The constantly shifting primary care landscape was like quicksand. We struggled to get our footing. But by supporting practices with practice facilitators and other experts on how to incorporate new evidence into practice, get data out of their EHRs and improve workflow, EvidenceNOW participating practices had higher delivery of the heart health services than other practices.”

Tess Miller, Dr.PH.

Deputy Director, AHRQ Center for Evidence and Practice Improvement



Laying the Groundwork for Future Progress

Backed by the encouraging results and lessons learned that came out of *EvidenceNOW: Advancing Heart Health*, **AHRQ has developed a proven model of how to improve primary care.** That has inspired the Agency to expand the application of the EvidenceNOW model to revitalize the Nation’s primary care system in numerous ways. Learn more: [EvidenceNOW: A Model for Heart Health and Beyond.](#)