

Simplified Health Plan Accreditation



The health plan division of a large, integrated care delivery system develops and manages government and employer programs to serve more than 400,000 members. This organization sought guidance from Clearlink Partners to support the development of a health plan accreditation readiness strategy for its four lines of business.

As part of a larger six-month quality transformation project, Clearlink guided the plan's leadership to understand the importance of the National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA) Health Plan Accreditation standards and achieve accreditation readiness for its government and employer programs. Through Clearlink's in-depth gap analysis and innovative recommendations and solutions, the health plan closed gaps and became better positioned to undergo the NCQA Health Plan Survey.



The Challenge

Prior to engaging with Clearlink, the well-known managed care plan had difficulty developing an approach to meeting NCQA requirements and determining an accurate accreditation readiness status to confidently move forward with executing improvements. Its team lacked a dedicated project manager who could be held accountable for overseeing the steps toward accreditation and failed to design specific tools, such as scorecards and checklists, to control the overall process or manage document revisions for health plan policies, procedures, programs, and role descriptions for each line of business. With no organized methodology for updating the necessary NCQA documentation and tracking task completion, the organization was unprepared to face future accreditation evaluations.



What Is NCQA Health Plan Accreditation?



An evidence-based framework for the systematic evaluation of processes and core operations of healthcare organizations in several key areas. Application of the framework allows plans to implement and standardize approaches, support efficiency, align performance to best practices, and improve member outcomes. It helps teams as they evaluate, measure, and improve clinical performance and consumer experiences, enabling them to implement evidence-based best practices for quality improvement and satisfying state requirements as well as community, member, and provider needs.¹



The Solution

Clearlink took a multifaceted approach to overcoming these challenges, offering accreditation governance, clinical management, and regulatory compliance solutions that would educate and equip the client to achieve its goals.

Clearlink began the engagement by analyzing the organization's existing annual programs, policies, and procedures; reviewing previous audits; and interviewing key stakeholders to obtain a more complete picture of its situation and objectives before applying tactics. Then Clearlink performed a comprehensive evaluation of current accreditation status through a detailed mock survey and created a quantitative NCQA scorecard to enable intentional project planning. The results facilitated a gap analysis that summarized recommended remediation activities by priority, key milestones, and projected timelines.

Accreditation Readiness Criteria

- 1 Preparedness**
Ability to produce required NCQA files, documentation, reports, and other materials at the time of mock survey
- 2 Accountability**
Established ownership of accreditation audit preparation responsibilities and clearly defined roles
- 3 Awareness**
Demonstrated understanding of NCQA, state, and employer accreditation requirements at the time of mock survey
- 4 IT Capacity**
Identified capacity for accreditation data support, reporting, and file creation and management

The Solution (Continued)

After proposing several critical recommendations for building an effective accreditation readiness program, Clearlink helped the organization execute the activities outlined in the plan to support the accreditation strategy. Collaborating closely with the client's internal team members, Clearlink enforced strong governance and project management around annual policy and procedure updates and optimized the structure of dedicated workgroups to support identified at-risk areas.

This included developing functional health plan policies, procedures, and programs; updating role descriptions and documentation for all lines of business; and creating tools to aid compliance. Accreditation committees benefitted from enhanced meeting alignment and communication, and accountable stakeholders began their education on NCQA guidelines, provider relations, and all relevant requirements through robust knowledge transfer trainings led by experienced Clearlink consultants. Population health management and utilization management file reviews also supported the plan's leadership in mitigating risk for must-pass accreditation elements.

Clearlink also found appropriate resources to oversee accreditation activities and collaborate with team leads to update and accurately integrate the accreditation standards into their current policies and procedures.



The Results

The organization was able to establish a clear path to greater accreditation awareness, accountability, and productivity with the help of Clearlink. It achieved a new level of transparency throughout its readiness processes, which allowed the plan to adopt a more ideal long-term approach and begin implementing high-impact solutions that simplify health plan accreditation.

The scorecard used to guide project planning functioned as the plan's accreditation survey tracker for the year ahead, giving team members a focal point for continued process improvement via accreditation compliance department staffing, mandatory new hire and onboarding education, and ongoing workgroup growth. Results from the completed mock survey indicated a high probability that the organization would be prepared to pass the 2023 NCQA Health Plan Survey after applying the changes spearheaded by Clearlink.

Key Services Provided

- **Accreditation Readiness Assessment**
- **NCQA Accreditation Scorecard**
- **Accreditation Readiness Gap Analysis**
- **Accreditation Governance & Workgroup Structure**
- **Accreditation Functional Plans & Tools**
- **Accreditation Policy Development & Refinement**
- **Accreditation Program Descriptions**
- **Health Plan NCQA Operational Assessment**
- **NCQA Standards & Guidelines Trainings**
- **Accreditation Process Change Management**
- **Accreditation Content Development & Delivery Trainings**



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About Clearlink Partners

Clearlink Partners is an industry-leading independent clinical and operational consultancy specializing in total cost of care that provides optimized, end-to-end clinical and operational management programs for managed care organizations, health plans, providers, and health systems. Through expert insights, innovative processes, and comprehensive solutions, Clearlink helps healthcare companies improve enterprise-wide alignment and navigate a dynamic healthcare ecosystem.

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1. [Health Plan Accreditation FAQs, National Committee for Quality Assurance](#)



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