

Announcement: Release of Draft Technical Specifications for Exploratory Cancer-Related Diagnostic Excellence Measures

The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) is releasing draft technical specifications for exploratory cancer-related diagnostic excellence measures under development as part of AHRQ's Quality Indicators (QIs) program. Originally developed by researchers at Brigham and Women's Hospital, University of Pennsylvania Health System, and Baylor College of Medicine (Houston), and sponsored by the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation's Diagnostic Excellence Initiative,¹ AHRQ is now continuing the work to refine these measures for quality improvement and diagnostic excellence. From several possible measures and concepts, AHRQ selected these measures based on criteria including importance (linked to important outcomes), scientific acceptability (validity and reliability), feasibility (works with existing data systems and clinical processes), and usefulness (provides actionable quality improvement information). These selections were informed by stakeholder input (including a multidisciplinary expert workgroup and public feedback via a [Request for Information](#)) and supplemented by AHRQ's own testing and chart review in claims, electronic health record (EHR), and registry data to assess scientific acceptability and feasibility. The measures are intended to support population-level diagnostic excellence surveillance and quality improvement by identifying patterns that may represent potential missed opportunities in the diagnostic process—such as delays in follow-up after cancer screening tests or cancers diagnosed at a late stage.

AHRQ's QI program is actively refining and testing diagnostic excellence measures with a population health lens and goals that include developing a starter set of measures, ensuring accessibility across different users and data environments, producing benchmarks for surveillance, and fostering quality improvement related to diagnostic excellence.

This initial release includes draft technical specifications for selected measures. Other exploratory diagnostic measures are also under development, and AHRQ plans to release an additional round of draft specifications and supporting materials as they are developed.

Exploratory Cancer-Related Diagnostic Excellence Measures

The measures included in these draft specifications release focus on three sets of concepts:

- **Timely follow-up after cancer screening**, including follow-up after abnormal screening results and follow-up after negative screening results.
- **Late-stage diagnosis**, capturing the proportion of cancers diagnosed at a late stage (as defined in the specifications), which may signal opportunities to improve earlier detection.
- **New cancer diagnosis following an acute presentation**, also called emergency presentation of cancer, capturing the proportion of cancer diagnosed at or immediately following an emergency department visit or unplanned admission, which may signal missed opportunities for diagnosis.

¹ Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation grants sponsoring these measure developers' work included [GBMF11506/GBMF11506.01](#), [GBMF9908](#), and [GBMF8838](#) (see Appendix B for more information). Coordination between Moore Foundation Grantees and AHRQ was facilitated by Battelle.

Intended Usage

These exploratory measures are intended to be calculated and used primarily at the health-system (or other healthcare delivery-organization) level to support internal quality improvement and diagnostic safety efforts. The measures are designed to help organizations identify patterns that may warrant closer review and to inform improvement activities across care settings. They are not intended for use in policies for reimbursement, public reporting, or other accountability purposes. Diagnostic care often spans multiple clinicians and settings and may be influenced by factors outside a single organization's control, so results should be used solely as a starting point for learning and improvement and interpreted with appropriate context.

Draft technical specifications for the measures in this release can be found at the following website [page](#). For two measures that are Consensus-Based Entity (CBE)-endorsed electronic clinical quality measures (eCQMs), AHRQ is providing links to the existing CBE technical specification pages (see Appendix A).

Additional Information

This release contains **draft technical specifications**. AHRQ expects to revise these specifications based on additional testing and stakeholder feedback.

AHRQ encourages users to review the draft specifications and submit inquiries and suggested revisions to the AHRQ Quality Indicators Technical Support inbox: QIsupport@ahrq.hhs.gov.

Appendix A – Measures Included in the January 2026 Draft Technical Specifications Release

Measure title	Description	Measure focus	Technical specifications
Rate of Timely Follow-up on Abnormal Screening Mammograms for Breast Cancer Detection	The proportion of patients who received timely follow-up imaging or breast biopsy after an abnormal breast cancer screening exam	Timely follow-up after abnormal screening	CBE-Endorsed Measure Specifications: Rate of Timely Follow-up on Abnormal Screening Mammograms for Breast Cancer Detection
Rate of Timely Follow-up on Positive Stool-Based Tests for Colorectal Cancer Detection	The proportion of patients who received a timely follow-up colonoscopy after a positive colorectal cancer screening exam	Timely follow-up after abnormal screening	CBE-Endorsed Measure Specifications: Rate of Timely Follow-up on Positive Stool-Based Tests for Colorectal Cancer Detection
Rate of Timely Follow-up after Negative Lung Cancer Screening	The proportion of patients who received a timely repeat chest CT after a negative lung cancer screening exam	Timely follow-up after negative screening	AHRQ draft technical specifications
Rate of Timely Follow-up after Abnormal Lung Cancer Screening	The proportion of patients who received timely follow-up interval CT imaging or additional diagnostic evaluation after an abnormal lung cancer screening exam	Timely follow-up after abnormal screening	AHRQ draft technical specifications
Late-Stage Diagnosis of Lung Cancer	The proportion of patients with new primary lung cancer that were diagnosed at a late stage	Late-stage diagnosis	AHRQ draft technical specifications
Late-Stage Diagnosis of Colorectal Cancer	The proportion of patients with new primary colorectal cancer that were diagnosed at a late stage	Late-stage diagnosis	AHRQ draft technical specifications
New Lung Cancer Diagnosis Following an Acute Presentation (Emergency Presentation of Lung Cancer)	The proportion of patients with new primary lung cancer diagnosed at or within 30 days of an emergency department visit or unplanned admission	New cancer diagnosis following an acute presentation	AHRQ draft technical specifications

Measure title	Description	Measure focus	Technical specifications
New Colorectal Cancer Diagnosis Following an Acute Presentation (Emergency Presentation of Colorectal Cancer)	The proportion of patients with new primary colorectal cancer diagnosed at or within 30 days of an emergency department visit or unplanned admission	New cancer diagnosis following an acute presentation	AHRQ draft technical specifications

Note: Patient, diagnosis, staging, and measurement period criteria are detailed in the measure specifications for all measures.

Appendix B – Measure Attribution and Key References

AHRQ collaborated with the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation's Diagnostic Excellence Initiative and its grantees (below), who provided AHRQ with draft measure specifications and supporting materials for measures under development. Coordination between Moore Foundation grantees and AHRQ was facilitated by Battelle. This appendix provides measure attribution and key references that informed the draft technical specifications.

Measure	Measure developer	Key reference(s)/specification sources
Rate of Timely Follow-up on Abnormal Screening Mammograms for Breast Cancer Detection	Brigham and Women's Hospital (Dr. Ania Syrowatka, Dr. Patricia Dykes, Dr. David Bates)	CBE-Endorsed Measure Specifications: Rate of Timely Follow-up on Abnormal Screening Mammograms for Breast Cancer Detection
Rate of Timely Follow-up on Positive Stool-Based Tests for Colorectal Cancer Detection		CBE-Endorsed Measure Specifications: Rate of Timely Follow-up on Positive Stool-Based Tests for Colorectal Cancer Detection
		Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation Grants: Evaluation of Diagnostic Performance for Follow-Up of Abnormal Screening Tests for Cancer (GBMF11506) Testing, Endorsement, and Implementation of Two Quality Measures to Improve the Follow-Up of Abnormal Cancer Screening Tests (GBMF11506.01)
Rate of Timely Follow-up After Negative Lung Cancer Screening	University of Pennsylvania Health System (Dr. Katharine Rendle; Dr. Anil Vachani)	Kim RY, Rendle KA, Mitra N, et al. Adherence to Annual Lung Cancer Screening and Rates of Cancer Diagnosis. <i>JAMA Netw Open</i> . 2025;8(3):e250942. doi: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2025.0942
Rate of Timely Follow-up on Abnormal Lung Cancer Screening		Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation Grant: Advancing Diagnostic Quality of Lung Cancer Screening Through Measurement (GBMF9908)
Late-Stage Diagnosis of Lung Cancer	Baylor College of Medicine in Houston (Dr. Hardeep Singh, Dr. Andrew Zimolzak)	Zimolzak AJ, Kapadia P, Upadhyay DK, et al. Frequent Missed Opportunities for Earlier Diagnosis of Advanced-Stage Colorectal or Lung Cancer. <i>JAMA Intern Med</i> . 2025;185(9):1102-1108. doi: 10.1001/jamainternmed.2025.2875
Late-Stage Diagnosis of Colorectal Cancer		Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation Grant: Clinical Quality Measure to Improve Diagnosis of Cancer: The Safer Dx Cancer e-Measure (GBMF8838)

Measure	Measure developer	Key reference(s)/specification sources
New Lung Cancer Diagnosis Following an Acute Presentation (Emergency Presentation of Lung Cancer)	Baylor College of Medicine in Houston (Dr. Hardeep Singh, Dr. Andrew Zimolzak)	Kapadia P, Zimolzak AJ, Upadhyay DK, et al. Development and Implementation of a Digital Quality Measure of Emergency Cancer Diagnosis. <i>J Clin Oncol.</i> 2024;42: 2506-2515. doi: 10.1200/JCO.23.01523
New Colorectal Cancer Diagnosis Following an Acute Presentation (Emergency Presentation of Colorectal Cancer)		Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation Grant: Clinical Quality Measure to Improve Diagnosis of Cancer: The Safer Dx Cancer e-Measure (GBMF8838)