



THE STATE OF HEALTHCARE QUALITY

**Priorities,
perceptions,
and the path
forward for
the workforce**

INTRODUCTION

Healthcare leaders are balancing many priorities, which present challenges to delivering high-quality, safe care. The potential for healthcare quality as a key strategy to tackle these challenges is significant, and NAHQ's recent ROI-Q report demonstrates this value clearly. Yet that potential has yet to be fully realized because perceptions of quality, roles in quality, and priorities in quality are variable among stakeholders in the industry. NAHQ sees this variation as problematic and a key reason that healthcare is not consistently delivering high-quality, safe, and financially sustainable healthcare.

As part of a multi-pronged approach to reduce this variation and help healthcare organizations leverage quality as a business strategy, NAHQ conducted a two-year national study. The study aimed to understand the perceptions and role of healthcare quality and priorities for healthcare leaders, and to ascertain the impact of these data points.

A nationally representative sample of healthcare professionals in clinical, administrative, and executive roles participated in the quantitative study, and the findings represent a promising evolution, both encouraging and instructive for healthcare leaders nationwide.

Most notably, the perception of quality is shifting from compliance to excellence and more stakeholders are understanding their role in quality. This is positive because when marginalized, the industry misses the opportunity to leverage quality and safety to drive better, more consistent patient outcomes and strong financial results.

REPORT FINDINGS

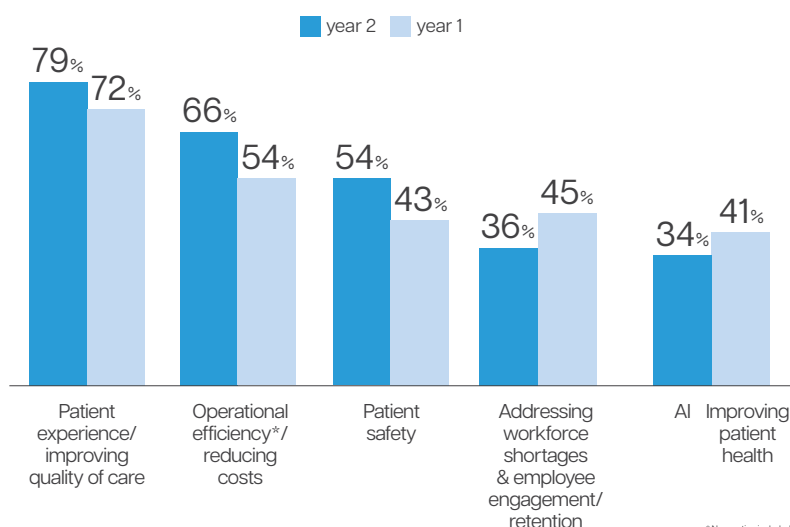
PRIORITIES FOR HEALTHCARE LEADERS

Improving care, reducing costs and addressing workforce shortages remain top objectives. Patient safety and AI emerge as new priorities.

In 2024, the first year of the study, we found leaders were most focused on three pressing issues facing the industry: improving patient care, tackling rising healthcare costs and addressing the looming workforce shortage.

In year two, we uncovered an evolution. While healthcare leaders continue to focus on care, cost, and the workforce shortage, patient safety has risen in importance, climbing into the third spot. This reflects a growing recognition that safety is foundational to sustainable, high-quality care. Artificial intelligence is also quickly reshaping the landscape. In year two, it had leapt from 10th priority into a top-five priority for healthcare leaders.

TOP 5 OBJECTIVES AMONG QUALITY DECISION MAKERS



PERCEPTIONS OF QUALITY

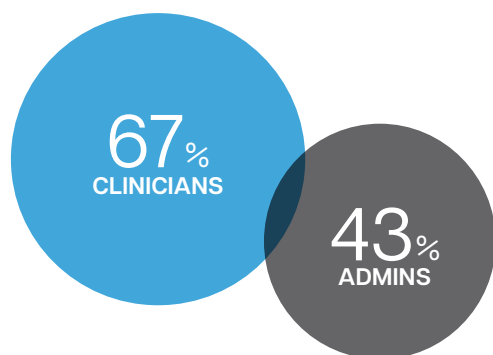
Perceptions continue to increase with gaps closing on key attributes from 2024 to 2025.

2024: Variability in how quality was valued

While healthcare quality has been increasing in perceived value over the years, 2024 data showed there was still variation in the definition of what quality was, who was responsible for it, and what it could contribute. This variability contributed to quality not being seen for its full potential as an effective strategy to achieve key healthcare objectives.



IS HEALTHCARE QUALITY A CORE JOB RESPONSIBILITY?



Perceptions varied particularly between administrators (quality professionals, quality leaders and c-suite decision makers) vs clinicians (physicians and nurses) with significant differences in whether quality was considered a core job responsibility as well as on the very definition of quality. While both saw quality as being tied to positive outcomes, clinicians viewed quality through the lens of patient outcomes and experience, while administrators saw quality more as systems and standards. This lack of common understanding creates challenges in working in a coordinated way towards common goals.

HOW **CLINICIANS** DEFINED HEALTHCARE QUALITY



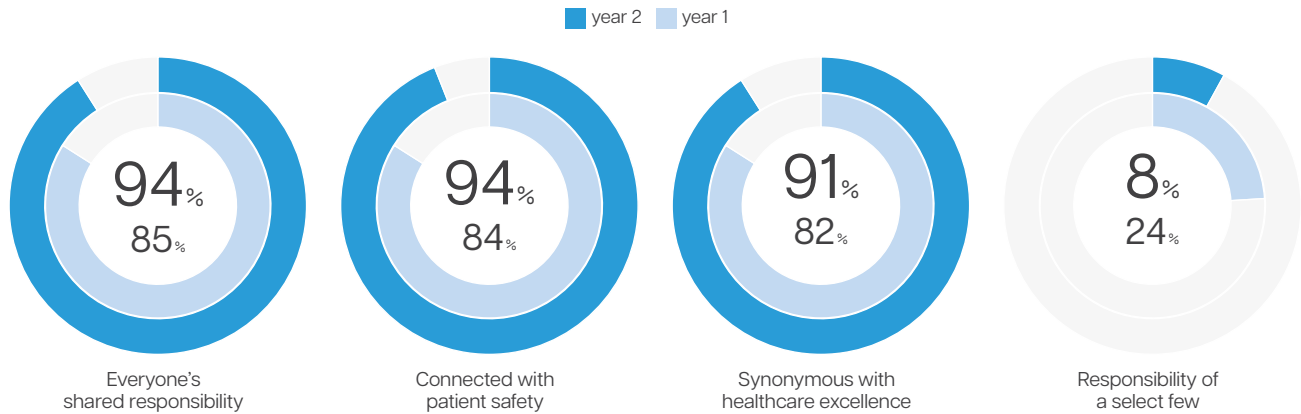
HOW **ADMINISTRATORS** DEFINED HEALTHCARE QUALITY



2025: Statistically significant gains in key areas

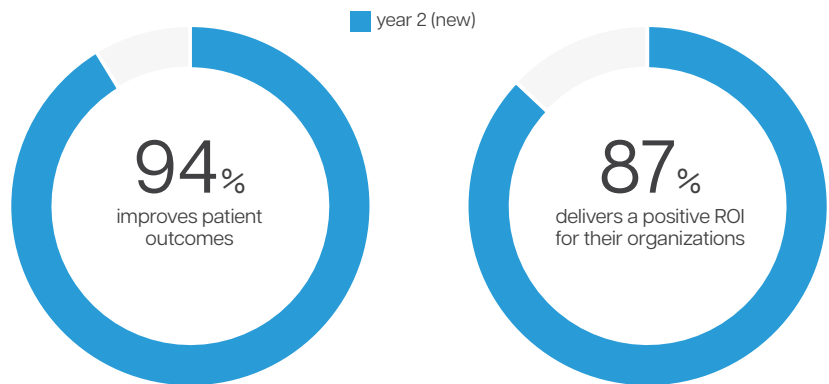
A year later, the follow-up study revealed decisive shifts in how quality and safety are perceived and valued. The findings represent a fundamental redefinition and evolved understanding of quality as a core responsibility and an enterprise-wide business strategy.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE HEALTHCARE QUALITY?



In year 2, NAHQ endeavored to delve more deeply into the perceived role of quality, asking new questions to understand perceptions of quality's role in impacting healthcare and financial outcomes. The findings validated that quality is being recognized as an effective strategy to achieve these critical objectives.

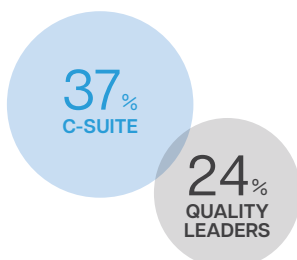
HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE HEALTHCARE QUALITY?



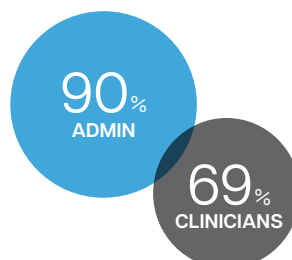
IMPLICATIONS OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE ON HEALTHCARE QUALITY

Recognizing the rising interest in AI, NAHQ explored its impact on quality and safety, and specifically, on the workforce. We learned there are differences in how AI is being prioritized between the c-suite and quality leaders and differences in attitudes on the value and benefits of AI between administrators and clinicians. This presents an opportunity to work towards greater alignment in prioritizing AI and its value across groups. Specifically, in order to successfully implement AI initiatives in the workplace, these findings provide key decision makers with new insights into how the workforce perceives AI to better inform workforce upskilling plans.

TOP 5 OBJECTIVES INCLUDE AI



VIEW AI AS POSITIVE



BENEFITS OF AI

ADMINISTRATORS
Improves monitoring and decision-making

CLINICIANS
Reduce administrative burdens and increase patient time

WHERE WE GO FROM HERE

This report and its implications come at an important time in healthcare. The new administration has increased its focus on efficiency and effectiveness. Healthcare executives are under tremendous pressure to solve the quality and cost conundrum. Workforce reductions are happening daily – even as organizations face extreme talent shortages.

And now, the industry is in the earliest stages of grappling with the impacts of AI, which brings both extraordinary promise and serious risks. There is more work to do, and importantly, as AI is implemented, quality and safety should remain the highest priorities.

The momentum in positioning quality as a strategic lever to tackle these challenges is real – but sustaining it requires continued investment in workforce development aligned to universal competency standards and adoption of new tools.

A NEW ROADMAP: THE ROI-Q™ REPORT

NAHQ has been working with organizations to demonstrate the positive impact quality can have on healthcare, and as a result, the industry perceptions are evolving, as the data above articulates. An example of NAHQ's efforts include the recently published ROI-Q report, which reveals the return on investment in quality. The findings are clear: when quality is leveraged as a business strategy, organizations see higher-functioning teams, improved quality and safety outcomes, and stronger financial performance.

And, if leveraged across the country, the U.S. healthcare system could achieve billions in cost savings while measurably improving patient outcomes.

Taken together, the survey data, the ROI-Q™ report and the category elevating initiatives strengthen a growing recognition across the industry that quality is not simply a compliance exercise – it is central to achieving healthcare's full potential. [READ THE REPORT](#)



A CALL TO ACTION

NAHQ invites all healthcare leaders to join us in this decisive shift by:

- ▶ Elevating workforce competencies
- ▶ Championing quality as a shared responsibility
- ▶ Safeguarding quality and safety in the age of AI
- ▶ Embracing quality as a business strategy
- ▶ Demonstrating that investing in quality saves dollars and improves lives

Learn more at NAHQ.org