

Choosing a Patient Safety Organization



Background

You are committed to making healthcare safer and better for your patients. One of the challenges to achieving this goal is the concern that patient safety information that you or your organization create as part of the care improvement process could also be used against you. Working with a Federally listed Patient Safety Organization, or PSO, can help.

PSOs were created as part of the Patient Safety and Quality Improvement Act of 2005, referred to as the Patient Safety Act throughout this brochure. The Patient Safety Act encourages individual providers and healthcare organizations to voluntarily report quality and patient safety information to PSOs confidentially and without fear of legal discovery. Using this process, PSOs can help healthcare professionals learn from quality and patient safety concerns to prevent similar problems from happening in the future.

An entity must meet certain requirements to become a PSO that is certified under the Patient Safety Act and use the “Listed PSO” logo (see illustration). The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality



(AHRQ), part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), administers the PSO certification and listing process, but is not involved in the PSOs’ work with providers. Each PSO and the providers it works with

determine the scope of the work they will do together under the Patient Safety Act. The HHS Office for Civil Rights administers and enforces the Patient Safety Act’s confidentiality protections.

*“80 percent of hospitals that work with a PSO found that the PSO’s feedback and analysis was helpful to prevent future patient safety events.”**

Benefits of Working with a PSO

Working with a PSO is voluntary. However, this collaboration offers several unique advantages that can enhance your patient safety and quality improvement activities:

- Over half of general acute-care hospitals surveyed already work with a PSO, and nearly all of them describe the process as valuable, according to a 2019 report from the HHS Inspector General. Among hospitals that work with a PSO, 80 percent said they find the PSO’s feedback and analysis on patient safety events have helped prevent similar future events.*

* Findings from the September 23, 2019 Final Report: Patient Safety Organizations: Hospital Participation, Value, and Challenges from the Office of The Inspector General, Department of Health and Human Services, OEI-01-17-00420.

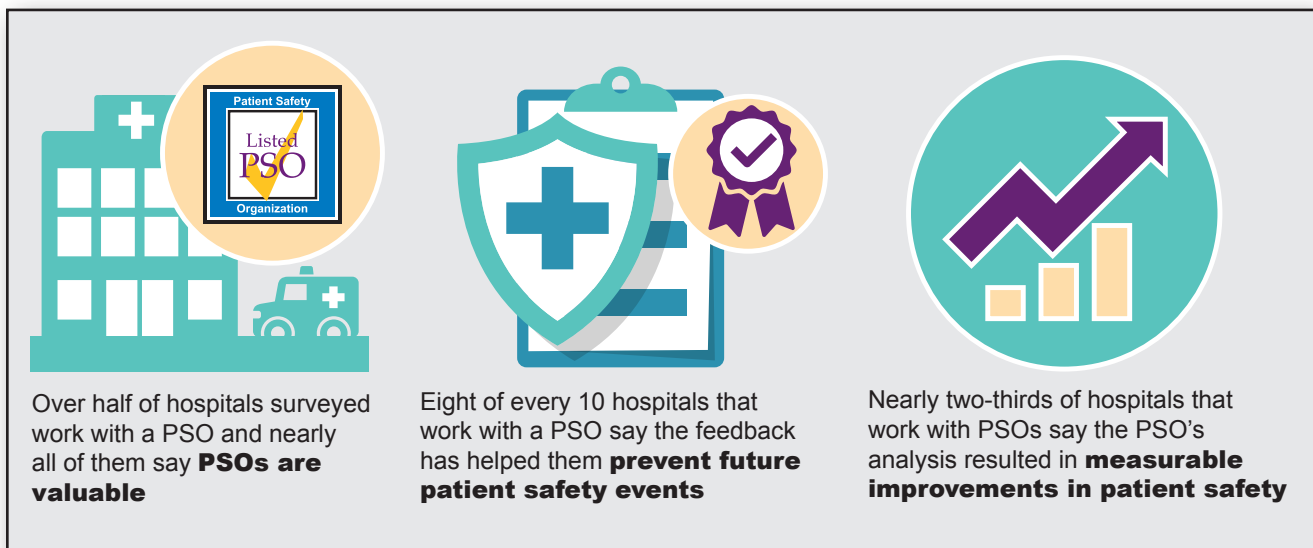


- Federal confidentiality and privilege protections apply to certain information (defined as “patient safety work product”) developed when a provider works with a PSO. With certain exceptions, patient safety work product is confidential and not subject to Federal, State, or local subpoena or discovery; may not be admitted as evidence in criminal, civil, administrative, or disciplinary proceedings; and is not subject to the Federal Freedom of Information Act or similar State and local laws.
- Federal confidentiality and privilege protections for patient safety work product apply in all U.S. States and territories, and across State lines.
- PSOs have experts who can analyze and aggregate patient safety work product to help develop insights into the underlying causes of patient safety events. PSOs can help you develop successful approaches to improving quality and reducing adverse outcomes. Feedback and recommendations provided by the PSO to the

provider are also protected as patient safety work product.

- PSOs can aggregate and analyze data from each provider and from multiple providers working with that PSO. This aggregation not only enables the PSO to detect patterns and trends not visible from smaller numbers of organizations or smaller health systems, but also has the potential to uncover serious and rare events sooner.
- By working with a PSO, providers can have their non-identifiable patient safety data included in the Network of Patient Safety Databases (NPSD). The NPSD (<https://www.ahrq.gov/npsd>) is a unique and valuable resource that can be used by anyone, including providers, for research and learning about how to improve patient safety and prevent patient harm. All submissions to the NPSD are non-identifiable to protect the confidentiality of patients, those who report events, and all individual providers and health care organizations.

Why Hospitals Value PSOs



Findings from the September 23, 2019 Final Report: Patient Safety Organizations: Hospital Participation, Value, and Challenges from the Office of The Inspector General, Department of Health and Human Services, OEI-01-17-00420.



Considerations When Choosing a PSO

Healthcare providers (individual clinicians, practices, and organizations) can work with any PSO, or with more than one PSO, so think carefully about your needs. When researching PSOs, consider the following questions:

Is the PSO “listed” by AHRQ?

Many organizations may call themselves “patient safety organizations.” But if the PSO is not listed by AHRQ, Federal confidentiality and privilege protections of the Patient Safety Act will not apply. To find out if a PSO is Federally listed, visit www.pso.ahrq.gov/listed.

Does the PSO specialize in a particular area of care?

Some PSOs specialize in a specific area, such as anesthesia or medication adverse events, or focus on improving practice in a particular medical specialty. Other PSOs may be able to provide services in many different areas of patient safety and quality improvement. You can search PSOs by specialty at www.pso.ahrq.gov/listed.

Does the PSO specialize in a particular healthcare setting?

Consider the type and number of providers who already work with the PSO. For example, a nursing home may want to work with a PSO that already works with nursing homes.

How will the PSO secure your data and protect it from inappropriate disclosure?

PSOs take a number of approaches to protecting data, a vital consideration for all healthcare organizations. AHRQ does not have specific hardware and software requirements that PSOs must meet, although the Patient Safety Act clearly defines the requirements for how to handle patient safety work product. Ask the PSO to explain in detail what steps it will take to secure and maintain the confidentiality of your data.

Is the PSO’s location important to you?

Because the Patient Safety Act is a Federal law, working with any listed PSO anywhere in the U.S. can provide the Federal privilege and confidentiality protections you expect. However, some providers may prefer to work with a PSO based in their geographic area. To locate PSOs in your area, visit www.pso.ahrq.gov/listed.

Does the PSO contribute data to the NPSD?

The NPSD aggregates non-identifiable patient safety information (meaning that it cannot be traced to any specific facility, provider, or patient) from PSOs on a national basis to identify trends and patterns and has the potential to explore and recommend national solutions to patient safety problems. The more data PSOs contribute, the faster national learning can occur to promote widespread change and improvement.

Does the PSO use AHRQ's Common Formats?

Many organizations have very good reporting systems that support their internal analyses, but these data cannot be aggregated or compared with similar information from other organizations. That's where AHRQ's Common Formats come in. The Formats allow "apples to apples" comparisons that support aggregation of data across organizations and accelerated learning among those who use them. To date, AHRQ has released Common Formats for hospitals, nursing homes, and community pharmacies. Currently, the NPSD only accepts data submitted in Common Formats. If you plan to work with a PSO with respect to these settings, ask if they use the AHRQ Common Formats.

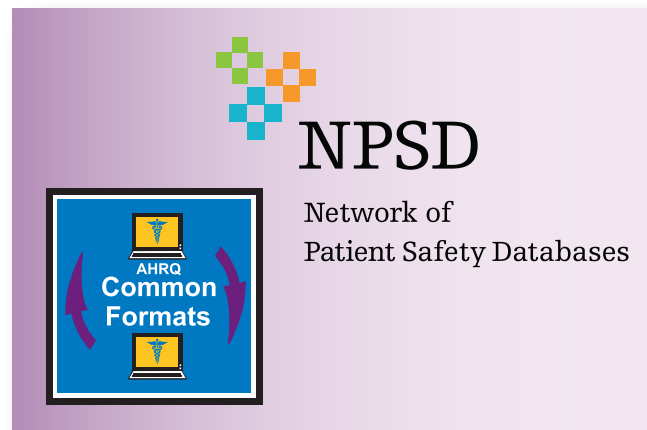
Other factors to consider when selecting a PSO:

- Which types of analysis and what services does the PSO offer, and are they valuable to you?
- Do the expertise, experience, and skills of the PSO's workforce align with your needs?
- What resources does the PSO offer providers in getting started with a PSO? For example, will the PSO help you set up a Patient Safety Evaluation System to report information to it?
- Do you know other providers who have used the PSO's services? What are their experiences?

Help Grow the NPSD

When considering a PSO, ask if the PSO reports data to the NPSD. By contributing data to a PSO that submits data to the NPSD, providers can accelerate the pace at which the NPSD can advance knowledge about patient safety. That way, everyone benefits.

- The NPSD uses data visualization products to develop informational tools, including dashboards and chartbooks, to make the data available for national learning purposes.
- The initial NPSD dashboards are based on more than 1 million records reported by providers to PSOs. As more records are submitted, AHRQ intends to update the dashboards and other NPSD tools.



- Because the NPSD contains a large volume of standardized, non-identifiable patient safety data from multiple sources across the country, it is a unique and valuable resource for research and learning about how to improve patient safety and prevent patient harm.
- Visit the NPSD website to learn more: <https://www.ahrq.gov/npsd>.

Find a Federally Listed PSO

For current contact information for Federally listed PSOs, visit <http://www.pso.ahrq.gov/listed>.

AHRQ PSO Program Contact Information

<https://www.pso.ahrq.gov/>

PSO Division, Center for Quality Improvement and Patient Safety

Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality
5600 Fishers Lane, MS# 06N100B
Rockville, MD 20857

Email: psos@ahrq.hhs.gov

Telephone (toll free): 866-403-3697

Telephone (local): 301-427-1111

TTY (toll free): 866-438-7231



AHRQ Pub. No. 20-0030
March 2020