

# How Can We Improve the Quality of Health Care Provided to At-Risk Older Adults?

The quality of health care provided to the elderly is an increasing concern.

- More people are surviving to old age.
- Existing tools for measuring quality of health care and health status are often inappropriate for the elderly.
- Older adults substantially prefer certain types of care and do not consistently prefer care that prolongs life over comfort.

RAND has developed evidence-based guidelines to evaluate the quality of health care delivered to community-dwelling older adults.

- A survey taken to assess age, self-rated health, limitations in physical capability, and functional limitations can identify elderly at risk for functional decline or death.
- Thirty-two percent of the sample in the pilot study was identified as vulnerable (proportion varies by population).
- Twenty-two illnesses and conditions were identified as most critical.
- Indicators of minimum standards for care were developed for each condition covering prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up.

The indicators can be used to assess and improve care.

- Fact sheets based on the indicators have been disseminated to primary care providers nationwide.
- Indicators are not practice guidelines (which aim to define optimal or ideal care in the context of complex decisionmaking); rather, indicators are tools to set a minimal standard for acceptable care.
- These indicators assess care at the system level, not at the level of the individual patient.

This work has entered a second phase, which aims to improve medical care provided to older adults and to develop methods for changing clinical practice that will be tailored to private settings.

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*This fact sheet is based on the following publications:*

“Developing Quality of Care Indicators for the Vulnerable Elderly: The ACOVE Project.” 2002;RAND RB-4545 (available at [www.rand.org/publications/RB/RB4545/](http://www.rand.org/publications/RB/RB4545/)).

Saliba D, Elliott M, Rubenstein LZ, Solomon DH, Young RT, Kamberg CJ, Roth C, MacLean CH, Shekelle PG, Sloss EM, Wenger NS. “The Vulnerable Elders Survey: A Tool for Identifying Vulnerable Older People in the Community.” *Journal of the American Geriatric Society*. 2001;49(12):1691–1699.

Wenger NS, Shekelle PG. “Assessing Care of Vulnerable Elders: ACOVE Project Overview.” *Annals of Internal Medicine*. 2001;135(8, Pt.2):642–646.