



# Integrated Home Care: Data-Driven Decision-Making for Quality Improvement at the Frontline

*Interview with Abram Gutscher, Program Manager, Integrated Home Care,  
Alberta Health Services, Calgary Zone*

Reflection: *"Quality Improvement work done by front line home care staff maximizes care for seniors."*

## What changed?

Six home care teams at different sites across Alberta participated in the team's innovation project. Here are some of the changes that resulted at the six sites:

- Formalized process improved communications between Home Care case managers and community partners for care of patients with ALS.
- Standardized format for palliative care rounds improved engagement and participation of all care staff.
- Shared electronic schedule ensured consistency in scheduling client visits and improved staff-to-staff communications.
- Reduction of documentation time needed for admissions let staff spend more time with clients.
- Implementation of a Kanban system reduced time spent searching for necessary forms.
- More visible information about staff increased ability of clients and their families to identify and access their assigned care givers.

The team participants received five days' training in Quality Improvement (QI) core education and one day of Alberta Health Services Improvement Way (AIW) Fundamentals education. Each team selected a different QI initiative.

"Our goal was to establish a sustainable framework for frontline involvement in QI work. Those involved in the project saw the value of Quality Improvement work," says Gutscher. So much so that a second set of projects was completed using in-kind resources.

## How did the seniors' voice or experience inform your project?

"We wanted to help home care staff both identify quality problems and test solutions. Most of the projects at the sites addressed the types of problems that busy staff work around because there isn't time to address them; staff were able to make the needed changes so that more of their time could be spent with seniors. The training and resources our project provided gave staff the needed tools to carry on with Quality Improvement work in their work place."

At one site the team identified that nearly half of their clients didn't know who their assigned care staff were, what roles they had or how to access them. The team's solution was to highlight caregivers



through highly visible posters, fridge magnets, information in admission packages and information sheets for managers. Family members were asked to evaluate the result. There was a 33% increase of awareness of their assigned caregivers among clients and families and a decrease in frustration for everybody. The updated magnet is now being used across all integrated home care teams.

### How did your thinking and/or that of your colleagues change?

“We knew that front line staff have the knowledge and experience to inform Quality Improvement work. What we wanted to do was build capacity through the training and specific on-site projects. We also realized that management involvement is critical to ongoing sustainability of QI work and to the resulting culture shift that needs to occur. When frontline staff are supported to do QI work, the results benefit everyone involved, especially seniors.”

### What do we need to ensure all seniors who need it can benefit from this change?

Building sustainability for QI work among front line home care staff requires training, dedicated time to participate, adequate time to complete projects, and support from management, leadership and colleagues. “Quality Improvement projects focused on administrative processes may not involve seniors directly, but if the project results in more care time for them, then the whole environment is improved for everybody. It has a definite and positive impact on clients and their families,” says Gutscher.