

What is Accreditation?

Your Questions Answered...

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Healthcare accreditation is an external review of the quality of care and services. It is “an internationally recognised evaluation process used to assess and improve the quality of, efficiency, and effectiveness of healthcare organisations”. Accreditation is also a way to publicly recognise that a healthcare organisation has met national quality standards.¹

What is an accreditation ‘program’?

An accreditation program provides a framework, usually through set criteria to meet specific standards. The standards are usually developed by health care professionals for health services. The granting of accreditation is the result of an independent, peer review of performance against those standards. See “The Benefits of Accreditation” <https://accreditation.ca/sites/default/files/value-and-impact-en.pdf>

Who creates the programs?

The Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Healthcare (‘the Commission’) is a government agency that co-ordinates national improvements in safety and quality in health care through the [National Safety and Quality Health Service \(NSQHS\) Standards](#).

The 10 National Safety and Quality Health Service (NSQHS) Standards were developed to encourage the implementation of safety and quality systems in healthcare. They aim to support healthcare professionals, organisations and policy makers who work with patients and carers, to achieve a consistent level of high quality care.

In September 2011, Health Ministers endorsed the NSQHS Standards and a national accreditation scheme for health service organisations started on 1 January, 2013.

Does Accreditation guarantee complete safety?

Although a healthcare organisation may have undergone and passed accreditation, it does not mean that quality care and patient safety is automatically guaranteed. Here are three primary reasons why:

- Accreditation can only review activity at a point in time. It does not mean that a system or process can become ‘failsafe’ for ever more, as human performance will always fluctuate over time. The goal is to assess competency and minimise risk and support continuous improvement.
- Accreditation cannot confer automatic assurance that every standard can and will be appropriately met all the time. Rather, it is recognition that the organisation has met the standards and demonstrated a level of care and effort required to **maintain the standards** as part of a continuous cycle of improvement.
- Accreditation can, and should be a positive indication that a culture of safety exists in an organisation.

What is the difference between Accreditation, regulation and certification?

Accreditation is a process of review that healthcare organisations participate in to demonstrate their ability to meet regulatory requirements as well as accreditation standards as assessed by a recognised accreditation organisation.

- Accreditation, depending upon which program is undertaken, is to a set cycle (usually three or four years). It provides an adaptable framework which outlines structures and processes to meet both regulatory requirements and local needs.
- Regulation is when there is a legislated requirement, usually through a national or state jurisdiction (such as a Dept. of Health).
- ACHS Certification is the process undertaken by those organisations who are looking to become an EQUIP accredited member in the future. It provides a pathway into EQUIP accreditation. Once certified, they aim to achieve accreditation within 18 months.



What is ACHS's background and structure?

The ACHS is an independent, not-for-profit organisation which celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2014.

ACHS is governed by a [Board of Directors](#) elected by [Council members](#) and supported by a corporate management structure.

Standards for evaluation, assessment and accreditation are determined by a Committee whose members are drawn from peak bodies in health, representatives of government and consumers.

The ACHS surveyors (professionals with current or recent healthcare experience) follow a rigorous review process and provide an informative educational approach to the on-site survey (reviews conducted on the member's site).

Are accreditation results publicly available?

ACHS publishes the results (i.e. "accredited") of our member's accreditation on our website at www.achs.org.au/achs-members/member-organisations-list/ but we do not publish the individual, detailed reports. The publication of performance-related information is at the discretion of our members.

Addressing poor performance

It is the role of the health care organisation to have a structure in place to monitor and correct poor performance. Accreditation programs provide information that facilitates the identification and/or correction of poor performance.

What standards does ACHS accredit to?

There are many different types of healthcare standards offered in the community, and there is a range of accreditation programs developed to specifically address individual types of health care services. ACHS currently accredits to 16 different healthcare accreditation programs. The majority of our members come under three distinct programs. They are:

- EQulPNational (a NSQHS Accreditation program for organisations required to be accredited to the NSQHS Standards, as well as five additional standards)
- The NSQHS Standards (of which ACHS is one of nine accreditation agencies that accredit to these standards.)
- EQulP6 for those organisations not required to be accredited to the NSQHS Standards in Australia, as well as all our international members through ACHS International (ACHSI).
- Trauma Recovery Program, (TRP) Standards
- Department of Health and Human Services (VIC) – Human Services Standards

There are other standards that ACHS assess which are not under an accreditation framework: National Standards for Mental Health Services and the NSW Disability Services Standards.

What happens when an organisation doesn't meet a standard(s)?

All member organisations are required to meet all the standards in the program they are being accredited to. For those standards they fail to meet, organisations are provided a period of remediation after which they are reassessed. The period of remediation differs according to which standards are being assessed. ACHS calls this process an Advanced Completion (AC).

References

Nicklin, W. (2011) *The Value and Impact of Accreditation in Health Care: A Review of the Literature*

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ACHS has created this factsheet to assist in better understanding of accreditation and the benefits it can bring to contemporary healthcare.
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