

The [New Jersey Health Care Quality Institute](#) is a nonprofit, membership organization working to improve the safety, quality, and affordability of health care for everyone.

In this [Quality Briefing](#), we explore best practices and tools for clinicians to use as they work with their patients to return to pre-pandemic levels of preventive care. An estimated 41% of adults in the U.S. avoided medical care during the pandemic because of concerns about COVID-19. According to a New Quest Diagnostics Health Trends™ survey, 3 of 4 Americans avoided a test when they believed they needed one.¹ Delaying recommended, high value screenings can have far reaching health implications.

Dr. Peter Fisher of Quest Diagnostics and Dr. Mary Campagnolo of Virtua Health, and the Quality Institute's Board of Directors, have contributed their professional expertise to this discussion about patient barriers to testing access, how to avoid unnecessary testing, and valuable tools to consider using in your practice.

Patient Barriers to Testing Access



Barriers to testing access can include insufficient health care coverage, health care staffing shortages, lack of transportation, and in some cases diagnosis related stigma.

Many physician practices offer point of care testing for commonly screened illnesses. However, the COVID-19 pandemic increased the need for at-home testing solutions. Many organizations are now offering at-home testing for a variety of health concerns including some of the most used screening and diagnostic tests.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has found specific at-home tests to be cost-effective, quick, and confidential.² The FDA promotes the following benefits of at-home testing:

- Detect possible health conditions when you have no symptoms, so that you can get early treatment and lower your chance of developing later complications (i.e., cholesterol testing, hepatitis testing).
- Detect specific conditions when there are no signs so that you can take immediate action (i.e., pregnancy testing).
- Monitor conditions to allow frequent changes in treatment (i.e., glucose testing to monitor blood sugar levels in diabetes).

¹ <https://provider.questdiagnostics.com/CovidCare>

² <https://www.fda.gov/medical-devices/in-vitro-diagnostics/home-use-tests>

[QuestHealth](#) is one example of a consumer-initiated testing option that allows patients to purchase at-home test kits online, submit samples by mail, and receive results in a private online portal. Clinicians should encourage their patients to check their carrier’s covered options for at-home testing.

One example of a successful at-home testing model is for HIV testing. The CDC recommends that everyone between the ages of 13 and 64 get tested for HIV at least once as part of routine medical care. But a 2019 CDC analysis of national survey data found that most Americans (61%) had never been tested for HIV. Research shows that HIV self-testing is an effective, convenient, and accurate way to diagnose HIV infection. CDC’s recent Evaluation of Rapid HIV Self-testing Among Men who have Sex with Men Project (eSTAMP) study found that self-testing increased the uptake of HIV testing; enabled more frequent testing; and resulted in people seeking care or additional testing after obtaining a positive result.³

At-home testing solutions should be considered as a valuable tool to combat barriers to testing access.

Unnecessary Testing



Unnecessary testing can be problematic for patients and the health care system. It can lead to potential misdiagnosis, false positives, false negatives, and overdiagnosis. Unnecessary testing is also a major driver of health care costs.

In 2012, the American Board of Internal Medicine (ABIM) Foundation created a program called [Choosing Wisely](#), that seeks to advance a national dialogue on avoiding unnecessary medical tests, treatments, and procedures. Choosing Wisely has helped clinicians and patients choose care that is supported by evidence, not duplicative of other tests or procedures already received, free from harm, and truly necessary. Choosing Wisely includes [resources and advice](#) for clinicians, health care professionals, community organizations and employers looking to implement Choosing Wisely and engage patients.

The US Preventive Services Task Force is an independent, volunteer panel of national experts in disease prevention and evidence-based medicine. The Task Force offers evidence-based recommendations about clinical preventive services to help guide appropriate testing.

Another tool to combat unnecessary testing is [Clinical Decision Support](#) (CDS). CDS are

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/pdf/policies/data/cdc-hiv-self-testing-issue-brief.pdf>

computer-based programs that analyze data within electronic health records to provide prompts and reminders to assist health care providers in implementing evidence-based clinical guidelines at the point of care. Because they are informed by a comprehensive view of the patient's clinical condition and history, CDS systems can help reduce unnecessary testing.

Resources

- [Quest Diagnostics Test Directory](#) – Search for tests and educational resources including test guides.
- [QuestHealth](#) – Search for tests available for purchase.
- [Choosing Wisely](#) – An initiative of the ABIM Foundation that seeks to advance a national dialogue on avoiding unnecessary medical tests, treatments, and procedures.
- [US Preventive Services Task Force](#) – An independent, volunteer panel of national experts in disease prevention and evidence-based medicine. The Task Force works to improve the health of people nationwide by making evidence-based recommendations about clinical preventive services.
- [Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services \(CMS\)](#) - CLINICAL DECISION SUPPORT: More Than Just 'Alerts' Tip sheet.
- [Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality \(AHRQ\)](#) – AHRQ is the lead Federal agency charged with improving the safety and quality of healthcare for all Americans. This link includes several resources to better understand the use of Clinical Decision Support.

