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CONTEXT

Health Links in Ontario have the flexibility to create their own strategies to deliver integrated health care services to the high needs population, depending on local conditions. It is critical to understand what value they may be adding to the system and how this value is being achieved.

OBJECTIVES

This report is the first in a series of 3 that respond to an Applied Health Research Question (AHRQ) from the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care (MOHLTC) to assess the value that Ontario's Health Links add to the health system. This report examines how value has been recognized and measured in U.S. Accountable Care Organizations (ACOs) and how these lessons may inform an evaluation of Health Links. A working framework for assessing value in Health Links is proposed.

METHODS

We conducted a narrative review of the health service and policy literature that provided us with a general understanding of the ACO initiative in the US and the Health Links initiative in Ontario and identified the way that value is defined and measured.

FINDINGS

ACOs in the US have several common characteristics yet important differences with Health Links in Ontario. Based on this, we propose the HSPRN Working Framework for Assessing Value in Health Links, containing the following three aims and eight performance domains:

Aims	Better Care for Individuals	Better Health for Populations	Lower Growth in Health Care Cost
Domains	Patient / Caregiver Experience	Preventive Care	Cost Containment
	Patient Outcome / Safety	Healthy Lifestyle	Adequate Use of Resources
	Care Coordination / Integration	Target Population Health Outcomes	

Most MOHLTC Health Link Performance Indicators are currently associated with care coordination and adequate use of resources, with no indicators in the areas of population health, patient outcomes and safety, or patient and caregiver experience.

CONCLUSIONS

The HSPRN Working Framework for Assessing Value in Health Links represents a first step into an operational definition of value for Ontario Health Links, and into providing a framework to guide the development of performance measures to assess the value actually created.

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