

Sustaining a Legacy: Aziza Nassar Leads by Cultivating Quality Improvement in the Greater Chicago Metropolitan Area

The Center for Quality Improvement & Innovation (CQII) congratulates Aziza Nassar of AIDS Foundation Chicago (AFC), for outstanding work in quality improvement (QI). CQII is honored to present Aziza with the 2025 Quality Award in the category of Leadership in QI, due to her leadership in developing dashboards, strengthening subrecipient capacity, and driving measurable gains in viral suppression across AFC's service network.



Aziza Nassar, Director of Quality Assurance and Improvement of AIDS Foundation Chicago

AFC is one of the largest HIV service providers in the greater Chicago metropolitan area, both providing service directly, and serving as the coordinating body for Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program (RWHAP) Part A and Part B. Under these contracts, AFC administers services throughout the region and manages a network of over 40 subrecipients delivering RWHAP-funded services and ensuring comprehensive care for approximately 4,000 people with HIV. Through leadership and collaborative efforts, AFC works to enhance access to health care, supportive services, and prevention resources, striving to reduce health gaps and improve outcomes.

As Director of Quality Assurance and Improvement, Aziza provides leadership in shaping how AFC realizes its commitment to excellence in service delivery both for services provided by AFC directly as well as for services provided by AFC's subrecipients. During her eight-year tenure, she has overseen all QI programming for AFC's Part A and Part B grants and has spearheaded initiatives that directly improved service delivery, client health outcomes, and systemic efficiency within AFC and across AFC's subrecipients. Her work focuses on three core areas: enhancing client outcomes, streamlining process improvements, and delivering training and technical assistance (TA) to AFC staff as well as to subrecipients. By implementing data-driven strategies, standardized best practices, and continuous performance evaluations, Aziza ensures that AFC's programs meet the highest standards of care while centering the evolving needs of the community.

At AFC, QI projects are selected each year based on a combination of internal strategic priorities, staff input, and feedback from funders. Aziza's collaborative and strategic approach

to QI helped address bottlenecks in housing services by leading a cross-team review of internal workflow, bringing together siloed sub-teams, standardizing processes like rental payments and lease tracking, and working closely with data services to streamline how information is entered and shared across programs. The changes that followed significantly reduced delays in lease approvals and housing placements, particularly benefiting the most vulnerable clients who were facing unstable housing conditions.

Aziza shared that one of the most rewarding aspects of her QI work has been witnessing the growth of a mindset that “QI isn’t just a project – it’s how we do business.” Aziza’s leadership includes using tools such as Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycles and structured tests of change for annual QI projects on data completeness, appointment attendance, and lab turnaround, which have led to a 10% increase in AFC’s viral suppression rates over the past seven years. From May 2024 to April 2025, Aziza’s team implemented two PDSA cycles to strengthen engagement in medical appointments, raising kept appointment rates from 76.7% to 89.1% and contributing to continued gains in viral suppression and patient care coordination.

Aziza created the region’s first data dashboard to make performance information more accessible and to help subrecipients better understand and use data for QI. Her goal was to build a data tool that clearly showed the Health Resources and Services Administration’s HIV/AIDS Bureau performance measures at both the agency and system level. Before this, most data were tracked in spreadsheets, making it hard to see trends, compare performance across programs, or use data for QI activities.

Following initial pushback from subrecipients over data accuracy, Aziza facilitated important conversations about performance measure definitions, data quality, and calculations. She worked closely with staff and subrecipients to clarify the data and introduced tools like data dictionaries to help people understand performance measure definitions and calculations. This led to confidence using the dashboard to conduct QI work. The dashboard displays both network-wide averages and agency-specific percentages, both in aggregate and at a point in time. The data dashboards contributed to measurable progress in access to HIV primary healthcare, food security, and housing stability due to the use of accurate, real-time data in QI work.

To support staff management of critical databases that are used to conduct QI work, in addition to other functions, Aziza helped design a structured approach to TA based on subrecipient feedback, site visit findings, and recurring data challenges. The four focus areas of TA request are data quality, QI, data dashboards, and performance measures, all of which affect AFC’s ability to conduct QI. By integrating TA requests with QI and support service processes, staff have access to tailored TA that meets their needs. Over the past three years, about 250 staff have participated in the program, which provided structured three- and six-month TA sessions

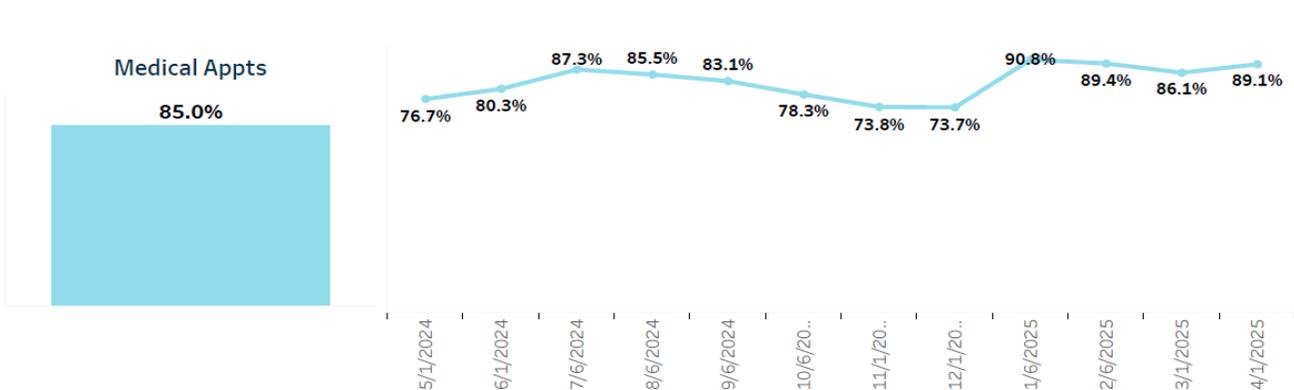
with individualized follow-up, leading to measurable improvements in data accuracy, reporting efficiency, and overall program effectiveness.

The current robust participation in QI activities across departments at AFC is in part due to the success of a proposal called 'Advancing Quality' that Aziza wrote and submitted to AFC senior leaders in 2023. The proposal emphasized the importance of conducting QI across teams, which was especially important since some performance measures declined after the COVID-19 pandemic. Aziza's proposal led to leadership support for activities to foster cross-departmental collaboration in pursuit of AFC's QI goals through monthly program-level QI meetings, quarterly collaborative sessions, and regular QI management meetings that focus on key performance measures, process improvement, training, and TA. Today, 90% of AFC's program departments actively participate in QI initiatives. To ensure QI activities remain client-centered, AFC engages Consumer Advisory Boards (CABs) to integrate client perspectives into program design. AFC's RWHAP CAB, which has been active for more than 15 years, is highly involved in shaping QI activities and recently provided input on a new client-facing portal that allows individuals to self-refer for RWHAP services.

Aziza says the secret to her success in QI is her team, "I truly love the team I work with—they share my vision, and they're the ones making it all happen day to day. I'm only as strong as they are," she shared.

AFC Ryan White Programs

Performance Report, Viral Suppression - PDSA
Med Appt Tracker '24-'25



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