

## Program management – Compensation for peer health navigators

In this chapter, we identify the responsibilities of the host agency that are related to peer health navigator compensation.

The literature and working group identified two agency responsibilities. The recommendations for the responsibilities are described below, along with a review of the evidence for each. The agency responsibilities are:

- Compensate peer health navigators equitably
- Develop compensation policies and procedures to guide how compensation is determined

### *Compensate peer health navigators equitably*

**RECOMMENDATION 1:** Compensate peer health navigators equitably, providing a fair and reasonable living wage. (Type of evidence: research and practice)

#### **Evidence**

Agencies are responsible for compensating peer health navigators for work performed and for work expenses *in a fair and equitable manner*.<sup>12,14,20,26,27,33–35,39–41,43,50,51,63,66,68,70–72,149,155,156,158,164–166,170,172,173,178–181,193,207–216</sup> Compensation should be competitive.<sup>28,35,70,166</sup> There are a number of ways that peer health navigators can be paid, depending on various circumstances (e.g., funding available to the agency; the social assistance status of the peer, which may impact ability of the peer to receive a salary; among others). In all cases, regardless of the method of payment, the amount should be fair and provide a reasonable living wage. Peers can be paid by:

- Salary – navigators are agency staff and receive a regular pay cheque. This is considered the most fair and equitable method of peer navigator compensation.<sup>20,51,63,70,149,164,165,170,172,173,209,213,215</sup>
- Stipend – navigators receive a pre-set amount of money for their work on a regular basis.<sup>34,41,51,66,70,71,179,180,211,216</sup>
- Honorarium – navigators receive a pre-set amount of money for a specific activity.<sup>12,14,27,40,43,70,155,156,158,166,181,193,207,208,212</sup>

*In addition* to monetary payment, peer health navigators can receive other benefits.<sup>14,20,24,25,33,51,63,183,185,189,217</sup> This is especially true for navigators whose ability to earn financial compensation is limited by social assistance policies. These benefits are *not a substitute* for monetary compensation via salary, stipend or honoraria. Additional benefits can include conference attendance;<sup>217</sup> workshop attendance<sup>51</sup> and other professional development opportunities, which allow peers to build their skills;<sup>63</sup> support for a job search<sup>28,217</sup> and academic credit;<sup>185,189</sup> social events;<sup>33</sup> vouchers, gift certificates, and discounts;<sup>63</sup> and food.<sup>25,156</sup>

Peer health navigators should be compensated during their training period and when attending other professional development events.<sup>20,37,175,182,205,208–211,216</sup> This not only acknowledges the time and effort of navigators but is in keeping with how other staff may be compensated.

**VIGNETTE** *During patient advisory meetings, the local HIV care clinic begins discussions about including HIV-positive people as peer health navigators in the work of the clinic. With the help of members of and staff from the local persons with HIV agency, the healthcare team begins planning a program in which trained peer health navigators work with staff to develop and run support groups. Despite the program being unfunded, the healthcare team feels that the peer navigators should be compensated. With no budget allocation and no means of paying salary to navigators, the healthcare team actively engage in efforts to secure funding to provide navigators with monetary compensation consistent with pay scales in the clinic. The healthcare team, working with the community agency, moves toward developing a formal proposal for a funded peer health navigation program in which peer navigators are compensated through a regular salary.*

**RECOMMENDATION 2:** Determine how to structure compensation (salaries, stipends or honoraria) for peer health navigators in conjunction with the agency’s financial expert to ensure the agency is not in violation of any employment standards. (Type of evidence: practice)

### Evidence

This recommendation emerged from the practice expertise of the working group.

## *Develop compensation policies and procedures to guide how compensation is determined*

**RECOMMENDATION 3:** Involve peer health navigators in the development of compensation policies that address their needs. Policies should reflect the limits on earnings of social assistance and disability programs. They should also clearly define the benefits to which navigators who receive salaries, stipends, wages or honoraria are entitled. Compensation policies need to comply with other agency policies and provincial and territorial legislation related to payment and benefits. (Type of evidence: research and practice)

### **Evidence**

Agencies hosting peer health navigation programs should have clear compensation policies and procedures.<sup>71,149,217</sup> Compensation-related policies clarify peer navigator expectations around payment,<sup>217</sup> and let them know when and how they will be paid.<sup>149</sup> Compensation-related policies should be flexible enough that each peer health navigator can negotiate a package of monetary and non-monetary compensation that works for them.<sup>63,68,217</sup>

Not all peer health navigators will be receiving social assistance but, for those who do, agencies should consider how their compensation policy may impact the social assistance benefits peer health navigators can receive.<sup>34,37,47,63,65,66,68,70,71,149,217</sup> There may be restrictions on what a peer health navigator on social assistance can earn before benefits are reduced or eliminated.<sup>47,68</sup>

There are strategies that agencies hosting peer health navigation programs can use to ensure that peer navigators retain their full benefits. This includes offering part-time or stipend positions,<sup>63,65,68</sup> hourly wages that are in line with the amount that social assistance programs allow,<sup>63,149</sup> and vouchers or gift certificates instead of cash.<sup>63</sup>

Agencies can support peer health navigators to make a decision about their compensation by raising the peer navigator's awareness of how compensation may impact their social assistance benefits if they are receiving them.<sup>34,51,217</sup>

Agency compensation policies should also clearly define the benefits that peer health navigators may receive as part of their compensation package.<sup>63,70,151,159</sup> Benefits can be part of the formal benefits packages that all salaried employees receive such as vacation days, personal days and sick days;<sup>63</sup> short-term and long-term disability insurance; life insurance;<sup>63</sup> and dental insurance.<sup>63</sup>

**VIGNETTE** Yu is offered a part-time peer health navigator position that will give him 17 hours of work a week with an hourly wage. When he is offered the job Yu asked his supervisor Obim how this might affect his income support program. They determine that the money is not sufficient for him to leave his income support program because it will have an impact on the amount he pays for his housing and on the amount he receives from the program. Yu and Obim look into other options to pay him.

Obim understands that using gift cards will cause a number of legal and ethical complications so he reviews the agency's compensation policy. It states that agency members who are employed will receive a cheque commensurate with the hours worked and the pay scale associated with that position. Obim with and Yu have a discussion to determine the optimal number of hours for Yu to work to maximize his income between paid employment and income support.

**RECOMMENDATION 4:** Develop an expense account policy for peer health navigators that ensures both that peer navigators are rarely expected to incur costs in association with their navigation role and reimbursement is provided in a very timely manner. Reimburse peer health navigators for pre-approved work-related expenses according to the policy. (Type of evidence: research and practice)

#### **Evidence**

Agencies are responsible for reimbursing the work-related expenses of peer health navigators<sup>20,34,44,50,51,66,71,180,205</sup> such as transportation,<sup>20,34,44,50,51,66,180,205</sup> food<sup>50,205</sup> and any fees they incur.<sup>44</sup>

# Chapter 5

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