

Infrastructure assessment for peer health navigation programs

In this chapter, we identify the necessary components of an infrastructure assessment. Infrastructure assessments should assess the capacity of the peer health navigation program host agency to support a peer health navigation program, and the capacity of the agency to work within a GIPA/MEPA framework.

The literature and working group identified three activities related to an infrastructure assessment for peer health navigation programs. The recommendations for the activities are described below, along with a review of the evidence for each. The activities are:

- Assess agency capacity to support a peer health navigation program.
- Assess agency capacity to work within a GIPA/MEPA framework.
- Assess agency readiness to ensure agency culture is inclusive.

Assess agency capacity to support a peer health navigation program

RECOMMENDATION 1: Assess agency capacity to establish, sustain and fund a peer health navigation program using an assessment process (this may be done in conjunction with community members and funders). Through this assessment, an agency should consider whether a navigation program is appropriate for the agency; whether the agency has the necessary structures in place to incorporate a navigation program; and whether the agency can establish the necessary structures to support a navigation program, if gaps in agency structures have been identified. (Type of evidence: research and practice)

Evidence

An agency considering a peer health navigation program should assess its capacity to establish and sustain a program,⁵¹ including identifying its goals for the program.^{34,51,61,62} Identifying program goals early can help the agency determine if it has the necessary infrastructure to support the program's proposed scope. Identifying goals for the program can help determine the roles peer health navigators will take on to support clients.⁶¹⁻⁶³

VIGNETTE *A community-based agency has applied for funding to develop a peer health navigation program. Fran, the agency's program director, led an organizational readiness assessment guided by the toolkit Building Blocks to Peer Program Success to develop the funding proposal. After the agency proposal is submitted, their funder, Ben, meets with Fran to discuss how the agency has planned to successfully implement and support a peer health navigation program.*

Ben and Fran's discussion focuses on the agency's vision for incorporating the work of peer navigators as collaborative partners in service delivery, both within the agency and with external partners. Fran describes the way in which the agency has updated their protocols and work flows to delineate the peer navigator's role in care planning, documentation, case conferencing and one-to-one client work. She also reports on an initial meeting the agency held with external partners, to provide an overview of the navigation program, and to identify ways to build collaborative practice to meet the needs of shared clients across programs and services.

Ben also asks about the agency's capacity to provide support and supervision to the peer navigator team. Fran outlines the agency's plan for training and orientation, as well as the resources they have put in place for weekly supervision, group debriefing sessions, and strategies to ensure one-to-one supervision is available when needed. Ben enquires about how the agency plans to structure the peer's remuneration and discusses equity in compensation for work done. Fran explains that the vision is for peer navigators to be compensated for work on an hourly basis, with a pay structure similar to that of the outreach workers who are also on staff. Finally, Ben asks about any structural shifts the agency has made to ensure adaptability regarding work schedules, to be responsive to navigators' unique needs with respect to length of the workday and week. Fran responds that the agency is in the process of updating their human resource policies and employee agreement to ensure they are able to incorporate the flexibility required to support the new navigator team.

Assess agency capacity to work within a GIPA/MEPA framework

RECOMMENDATION 2: Assess agency capacity to work within a GIPA/MEPA framework. (Type of evidence: research and practice).

Evidence

An agency should assess its capacity to ensure the greater involvement and meaningful engagement of people with HIV (GIPA/MEPA). The involvement and engagement of people with HIV in peer health navigation programs can have significant benefits for people who become navigators. Supportive leadership and a genuine commitment to the engagement of people with HIV in all aspects of program development and delivery, in various capacities, is extremely important.⁵⁰

Agencies hosting peer health navigation programs should assess whether they can create a space where:

- People with HIV inform all aspects of service delivery⁵¹ so that peer health navigators who reflect the clients served can be hired and supported in a flexible and inclusive manner.⁵⁰
- The agency seeks to understand, is flexible and responsive to the needs and realities of navigators' lives (periodic illness, substance use, mental health challenges, family emergencies, other work commitments, etc.).⁵⁰
- Peer health navigators are considered colleagues.⁶⁴
- There are opportunities for navigators to develop their skills further.²⁶
- All implications of peer involvement are recognized and addressed, including benefits and any drawbacks that can be experienced by the peer navigator.

RECOMMENDATION 2a: Assess agency commitment to working with a GIPA/MEPA framework (Type of evidence: practice)

Evidence

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

VIGNETTE *A local community-based agency currently provides case management for people with HIV. The agency is expanding to develop and deliver a peer health navigation program. In reviewing Practice Guidelines in Peer Health Navigation for People Living with HIV, a consultant working with the agency to develop the program recommends that they consider how GIPA/MEPA principles are currently incorporated into the agency's work, and how they will be integrated into a peer navigation program.*

The agency's leadership reflects on how it has engaged people with HIV in its work so far.

The agency admits that it has not done enough to work within a GIPA/MEPA framework. They understand that the GIPA/MEPA principles aim to realize the rights and responsibilities of people with HIV, including the right to self-determination and participation in the decision-making process. Therefore, they engage people with HIV who are currently using services within their organization but they also reach out to other organizations to help actively link them to people with HIV from other organizations. A large group of diverse people with HIV from the community are brought together to help determine how they want their voices heard within the development of this program. Based on these consultations, multiple sessions are held to provide space for input into the development and delivery of the program and an ongoing committee is struck to ensure continued input into the delivery of the program. In the end, many of these people with HIV become peer health navigators within the newly developed program.

Assess agency readiness to ensure agency culture is inclusive

RECOMMENDATION 3: Assess agency readiness to ensure agency culture is inclusive of peer health navigators. (Type of evidence: practice)

Evidence

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

Chapter 1

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