Integrating peer health navigators into a host agency

In this chapter, we explore how to integrate peer health navigators into a host agency.

The literature and working group identified three agency responsibilities related to integrating peer health navigators into a host agency. The recommendations for the responsibilities are described below, along with a review of the evidence for each. The host agency responsibilities are:

- Train staff on the greater involvement/meaningful engagement of people with HIV (GIPA/MEPA)
- Orient host agency staff on peer health navigators in the work place
- Provide specific training to peer health navigation program supervisors

Train staff on GIPA/MEPA

RECOMMENDATION 1: Provide all host agency staff with training on GIPA/MEPA. Practising GIPA/MEPA Principles increases the effectiveness of policies, programs and services for people with HIV. (Type of evidence: research and practice)

Evidence

Agencies hosting peer health navigation programs should provide GIPA/MEPA training to all agency staff. Staff training can underscore how a GIPA/MEPA framework creates a space where people with HIV inform all aspects of service delivery;[51] how the agency is flexible to the needs and realities of navigators' lives (periodic illness, substance use, mental health challenges, family emergencies, other work commitments, etc.);[50] why peer health navigators are considered colleagues;[50] and how the agency facilitates opportunities for navigators to develop their skills further.[26]

GIPA/MEPA training is the first step in promoting a culturally safe[25,51] and respectful[167] work environment for people with HIV.[25,51]

Orient host agency staff on peer health navigators in the work place

> **RECOMMENDATION 2:** Provide all host agency staff with an orientation on the peer health navigation program. (Type of evidence: research and practice)

Evidence

Agencies are responsible for providing all agency staff with an orientation to the peer health navigation program and peer health navigators in the work place.[51,72] This includes an orientation for all staff before a peer health navigation program is first introduced,[51,220] and for all staff hired after a peer health navigation program has been established.[51,72]

Host agency staff may not have experience working with peer workers as colleagues. It is important that staff receive orientation and training before peer health navigators start working.[63,71,194] Training and orientation can help staff to understand the value of peer health navigators to the work of the wider team and support their integration into it.

> **RECOMMENDATION 3:** Provide all host agency staff with training on the roles and responsibilities of peer health navigators. (Type of evidence: research and practice)

Evidence

Agencies should also train staff on the roles and responsibilities of peer health navigators.[34,43,50,51,71,156,194,220] For more information on the roles and responsibilities of peer health navigators, see Chapter 2.

Training can include an examination of the value of peer work[43,50,51,71,156,194] and the goals of a peer health navigation program.[51] It can also include an explanation of the roles and responsibilities of peer health navigators[34,51,194] and when and how to include peer health navigators in discussions about clients.[71] Training should explain the unique challenges peer health navigators face as both service providers and service users,[24,71] and make it clear that peer health navigators are colleagues rather than clients when they are in their role as service provider.[71,73,220]

> **RECOMMENDATION 4:** Provide all host agency staff with a clear understanding of how peer health navigators are situated within an agency's structure to help guide respectful interactions between staff and peers and ensure appropriate boundaries are kept. (Type of evidence: practice)

Evidence

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

Provide specific training to peer health navigation program supervisors

> **RECOMMENDATION 5:** Provide peer health navigation program supervisors with specific training on supervision and support of navigators. (Type of evidence: research and practice)

Evidence

Agencies are responsible for providing additional training to peer health navigation program supervisors.[51,63,67,194] For more information on peer health navigator supervision, see Chapter 6.

Both administrative and clinical supervisors should have the skills and knowledge to meet the unique supervision needs of peer navigators.[28,63,66,69,70] This can include training on the program's policies and procedures,[63] and training on communication skills.[63] Strong communication skills can help supervisors build rapport with navigators so they can provide them with encouragement and constructive criticism.

RECOMMENDATION 6: Facilitate the introduction of individual peer health navigators to host agency staff. (Type of evidence: Practice)

Evidence

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

Chapter 9
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