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Science Interventions
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#345 - Implementing and evaluating the impact of a pilot systems-based suicide prevention capacity building program

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Objectives/aims

The Black Dog Institute developed a pilot Suicide Prevention Capacity Building Program which was implemented in eight different locations throughout metro, regional, and rural NSW.

The program, informed by Australia's first systems-based suicide prevention approach known as 'Lifespan', combined both implementation science and evaluation theory and had the following objectives:

Implementation objectives:

- To implement the evidence from the Lifespan trials in different settings, involving both systems approaches and place-based, collaborative work.
- To determine how the evidence can be implemented nationally to diverse communities in an accessible way and have local impact.

Evaluation objectives:

- To answer key evaluation questions regarding adherence to the model, participant satisfaction of the program, and whether there was any increase in participants' knowledge, skills and attitudes.
- To determine how to make the evaluation data accessible and useable to the implementation practice team in a timely manner to inform the continued development of the program

Methods

The implementation practice and evaluation teams worked collaboratively and iteratively to use data and evidence to advance the program. Principles of evaluation rigor, utilisation and innovation, and adaptation were important. Strategies included

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the teams co-creating the program logic model, the evaluation plan and the data collection instruments. Data was constantly collected, analysed, reviewed and fed back into the system. The implementation practice team responded to this feedback and adjusted the program, whilst maintaining fidelity to the evidence.

An early version of the program involved working closely with sites to understand how to apply an evidence-based program, with consideration of each specific cultural, geographic, and economic context. Program development was an intentionally slow process in the earliest stages, as feedback was coming directly from grassroots groups and informing the content and delivery of the program.

Both quantitative and qualitative data was collected from program participants across all sites. Survey data was collected from participants at the end of each of the six workshops. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the site coordinators at the end of the program. At specific sites, deeper analysis and case studies were produced that outlined the lessons learnt.

Main findings

Participant satisfaction was high along with reported attitude changes and increases in knowledge about systems-based approaches. Skill development was slightly lower, which created an opportunity for the team to learn, question and adjust the skills developed through the program. Skills that increased collaboration and understanding of systems specific to a particular place were found to be important, rather than program-based implementation skills.

As the implementation of the program continued, and collaboratives emerged in each place, more practice-based evidence was gained. Insights included the importance of building strong relationships, understanding the strengths and unique attributes of each place and ensuring community voices and the voice of lived experience were incorporated into the collaborative.

Along with results from the program, the teams learnt that being principles-led was an important element of the process; open collaborative relationships were pivotal to the cycles of action and reflection; collecting and analysing data in a timely manner helped inform ongoing implementation; and being flexible in delivery of the program enabled the program to evolve.

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The program that has been developed relies on both evidence-based practice and practice-based evidence. Part of its success is the inclusion of elements that allow the program to be localised. Before another cycle of implementation, the project team is ready to ask new questions about sustainability and scalability. How can the program be further refined to meet place-based needs of local collaboratives? How can a more tailored program be scaled up while maintaining implementation fidelity? How can quality relationships still be at the heart of an expanded, more streamlined program?

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