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#145 - Enhancing Program Sustainment and Sustainability through Collaborative Evaluation Approach

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Aims

Young people with mental illness are at a higher risk of unemployment, and accessing Individual Placement and Support (IPS) services has proven effective in improving their employment outcomes and overall well-being (Bond, Becker et al. 2001). The Productivity Commission has recommended the introduction of IPS services across primary care mental health services in Australia (Productivity Commission 2020). However, the successful rollout of IPS services faces a challenge due to the shortage of a skilled workforce (Department of Social Services 2019). In response to this challenge, Orygen was tasked by the Department of Social Services in 2021 to develop and implement the IPS Workforce Development Framework (IPS-WDF) specifically for IPS workers in headspace. The IPS-WDF focuses on addressing capability gaps, recruitment variation, career pathways, and challenges in retention. It includes activities such as training and credentialing, establishing career pathways, strengthening recruitment processes and pathways, and promoting peer-to-peer learning. However, the challenge lies in sustaining the long-term benefits of the IPS-WDF, as research suggests that evidence-based changes tend to fade once implementation support is withdrawn (Proctor, Luke et al. 2015). This study aims to identify determinants of sustainment and sustainability specific to the IPS-WDF through formative and process evaluation conducted before and during the implementation process. The findings will help stakeholders strategically plan for the long-term viability and value of the IPS-WDF.

Methods

Our research team adopts a collaborative evaluation approach (O'Sullivan 2012, Fetterman, Rodríguez-Campos et al. 2014), emphasizing joint responsibility between evaluators and stakeholders, including the implementation team. We work together to develop data collection strategies and routine processes for shared data analysis, reflection, continuous learning, and improvement. Collaborative evaluation is integrated into the program implementation process, rather than an afterthought. By leveraging this approach, formative and process evaluation elements provide crucial

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information to guide improvements in the IPS-WDF, with a focus on long-term sustainment and sustainability. To achieve this, we employ a convergent mixed-methods design (Creswell and Clark 2018), collecting qualitative and quantitative data in parallel. The analysis is conducted separately for each type of data, and we integrate the results using the Integrated Sustainability Framework (Shelton, Cooper et al. 2018), and Framework for Reporting Adaptations and Modifications (Stirman, Miller et al. 2013). Our data analysis includes reviewing policy and implementation documents, conducting secondary and program data analysis, case studies, as well as interviews and surveys with stakeholders.

Findings

In this presentation, we will share preliminary data (collected July-August 2023) on the reach of different program components, particularly the online learning, professional support, and peer-to-peer learning, among IPS vocational specialists. Additionally, we will present data on the acceptability of the developed online learning program from the perspective of IPS vocational specialists. Insights from interviews conducted with the implementation team and key stakeholders will be shared, focusing on elements of program sustainment and adjustments made to the implementation plan based on preliminary findings regarding program acceptability and reach. Furthermore, we will present an analysis of data recorded by the implementation team on their communication with stakeholders during the initial implementation of different program components, with a specific focus on the implementation context and its relevance to program sustainment and sustainability.

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