

Title

Statewide Implementation of Social Needs Screening in Mental Health Clinics: Staff Perception of Client Benefit

Abstract

Background

Despite the well-established association between health-related social needs and mental health diagnoses, most studies on screening for social needs have been in primary care rather than mental health settings. Given the increasing national and regional focus on implementing social needs screening, including in mental health settings, it is critical to understand practices that can be improved early in these large-scale implementation efforts.

Objective

To assess staff experiences and attitudes following an implementation of social needs screens in specialty mental health clinics across New York State, and identify the client, clinic, and county factors associated with perceived benefit overall and for specific social needs.

Method

CMS's Accountable Health Communities (AHC) Screen was implemented in 110 mental health clinics in NYS between 5/2023-1/2024. Following implementation clinics completed a survey on processes used to implement the AHC, interventions to address positive screens, and perception of benefit of screening and interventions for adults, and children/families served by the clinic.

Results

The proportion of clinics routinely using a social needs screen increased from 16% to 85%. The majority of clinics reported that social needs screening helped identify clients with unmet social needs, interventions implemented to assist those with positive screens were beneficial to clients, and that the information could be used to improve the therapeutic relationship with clients. However, there was variation in perception of benefit of screening and interventions by client level factors (lower for children and their families than for adults), and by type of social need (lowest for housing, and highest for food insecurity), and county level factors (higher benefit in poorer counties). In addition, perception of benefit to clients varied by clinic implementation approach.

Conclusion

The results can be used to identify implementation factors that are associated with positive staff appraisals and assess overall implications for promoting health equity.