

HIV Peer Navigation Program Guidelines



THE FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH – BUREAU OF
COMMUNICABLE DISEASES – HIV/AIDS SECTION

HIV Peer Navigation Program Guidelines

Peer navigators are traditionally persons living with HIV (PLWH), who are treatment adherent and share similar experiences and live within the same communities as the people they mentor. Peer navigators are trained to counsel other PLWH and encourage engagement and retention in care and support services. Peers educate clients on medication and treatment adherence by providing training, health resources, and mentorship. The role of the peer navigator is to act as a bridge between care providers and clients who require assistance in accessing medical, social and mental health-related services. A peer navigator is someone who has accepted their HIV diagnosis, and has learned to live well with HIV.

Peer navigators are role models who provide reliable and relevant information to help clients overcome barriers that may prevent engagement, retention, or re-engagement in treatment. Peers provide PLWH with guidance and advocacy that is intended to supplement the education and information provided by medical case managers and clinicians. The personal experience of living well with HIV make peers a valuable resource for service providers and for clients. The goal of peer navigation programs is to improve health outcomes for newly diagnosed individuals, those transferring their HIV care to another clinic or organization, or those re-engaging in care.

OBJECTIVES OF PEER NAVIGATION PROGRAM

- Provide linkage to care and/or active referrals to patients in a timely and coordinated manner.
- Assist clients in developing skills needed to ensure treatment adherence and viral suppression.
- Work directly with clients to support medication and treatment adherence practices
- Collaborate with the local area linkage specialists within county health departments as appropriate.

ROLE OF PEER NAVIGATORS

- Meet with newly-diagnosed clients and those re-engaging in care. Talk through the client's concerns and assess their needs.
- Assist clients with learning the ins-and-outs of Florida's Ryan White Program (RWP) and AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP) eligibility process.
- Guide clients through each step of care initiation.
- Help clients navigate the medical care system and access needed services.
- Accompany clients to medical and other appointments, where feasible and appropriate.
- Address treatment adherence needs and coach clients in adherence skills.
- Provide realistic advice for integrating adherence and wellness practices into daily life.
- Provide one-on-one and/or group-level social and emotional support.
- Enhance engagement in care by assisting clients with appointment reminders for eligibility, ADAP, case management, health care/primary care, and laboratory appointments.

- Contact clients who have missed appointments and identify barriers that are preventing engagement into care.
- Follow-up with clients to overcome barriers to obtaining and remaining in care.
- Work collaboratively with primary care providers and case management staff to identify newly-diagnosed patients who can benefit from peer support.
- Facilitate linkage to medical care and treatment, and provide active referrals for needed supportive services.
- Attend/facilitate peer-led support groups, if applicable.
- Provide HIV and health education.
- Conduct new client orientation.
- Help train new peer navigators.

BASIC KNOWLEDGE OF PEER NAVIGATORS

- General knowledge of local medical provider networks and the services offered in the community.
- Knowledge of HIV, disease progression, and physical impacts including the role of viral load and CD4 cells in disease progression and a thorough knowledge of modes of HIV exposure and prevention.
- The importance of adherence to antiretroviral medication regimens for preventing disease progression and the development of viral resistance.
- The ability to provide training and education on strategies that improve medication adherence.
- A general understanding of medication side effects, and how side effects can impact treatment adherence.
- Knowledge of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), their connection to HIV, their impact on the health of PLWH and how STIs are transmitted and prevented.
- Knowledge of Florida's RWP and ADAP eligibility processes.

COMPETENCIES AND SKILLS OF PEER NAVIGATORS

Life Experience with HIV/AIDS

Peer navigators must have a personal experience managing HIV in their own lives and employ effective self-care strategies. Peers have had to come to terms with the decision to take charge of their health and well-being by initiating/accessing treatment, and have dealt with the pitfalls and confusion that can come from applying for and receiving publicly-funded HIV care and supportive services.

Ability to work with diverse groups

Peer navigators must have strong interpersonal skills and a level of cultural competency that enables the peer to render high quality services to all program participants with respect and compassion. Peer navigators must understand their own personal and cultural identity and how these characteristics influence their attitudes, reactions and assumptions.

Ability to embrace and communicate a positive, self-affirming, empowering attitude toward the lives of PLWH

Peer navigators must demonstrate through assertiveness and action, their own state of empowerment and their ability to challenge powerful barriers such as stigma, fear, and hopelessness.

Strong communication skills

Peer navigators must have the ability to speak clearly, deliver information in a manner accessible to a range of clients, conduct formal discussions that are responsive to client needs, and be capable of eliciting personal information from clients in a respectful manner. Peer navigators must be able to write clearly in order to provide basic documentation of the services provided.

Ability to advocate for one's self and for others

Peer navigators should be able to advocate for themselves, their clients, and for access to services even when organizational structures or processes are not supportive.

Peer Program Staffing

- Keep your program staffed with peer navigators. Programs should retain peers whose primary responsibility is to work within or in conjunction with the provider's clinic. Providers should continue to identify and train peer candidates to ensure that alternates or replacements are available. Individual employee roles and responsibilities can be designed to meet the needs of this program if the full range of job functions are performed.
- Programs should train and support peer navigators: Peer programs need to train and instruct peers as necessary to accomplish the objectives of the program.
- Peers should be trained to communicate professionally and appropriately with clients, other providers and community partners. Extra training and reinforcement should be provided in response to written feedback from clients, providers or provider's clinic staff.
- Supervision of peer navigators: Program supervisors should assess each peers' performance monthly for the first six months of the program and quarterly thereafter. The program supervisors should compare the peers' performance to the job description and advise of opportunities to improve, any concerns or gaps in performance so the program may resolve any training issues or barriers to performance.
- The program supervisor should obtain written feedback from clients about each employed peer, stating that performance was either acceptable or unacceptable. If feedback reflects unacceptable performance, the Department of Health will provide specific technical assistance to the peer supervisor to make improvements or changes.
- Peer program offices should advise the linkage program specialist of staffing changes within 15 calendar days after they occur.