



Institute for Community Health

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Planting seeds for sustainability: Navigating behavioral health services with immigrant families.

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From the average parent's perspective, to navigate the pediatric behavioral health system is challenging. Coverage for mental health and substance abuse services is often based on strict and diverse eligibility categories that are not easily understood; furthermore, services may be scarce. For immigrant families, limited language capacity and systems knowledge create additional barriers to accessing community behavioral health services and contribute to health disparities.

Cambridge and Somerville, MA, are working across city and disciplinary boundaries on the "Parent Navigator" project. Prevention coalitions, mental health, substance abuse and primary care providers are collaborating to train bilingual immigrant parents on the availability of and access to community mental health and substance abuse services. These trainings equip Parent Navigators with knowledge about insurance, physical health and behavioral health resources. Parent Navigators are then able to disseminate information to family, friends and colleagues, through culturally appropriate channels and in their own languages. Through these informal, yet viable, communication channels, more members of immigrant communities are able to access existing health resources.

The three-pronged approach used to promote sustainability includes (1) Participatory planning with two prevention coalitions to build their organizational infrastructure; (2) Creating and strengthening community partnerships to increase the visibility of the Parent Navigator program and to integrate it into local networks; and (3) Implementing a strong evaluation plan to provide tools to increase training participation, inform strategic planning processes, and improve and establish the effectiveness of the program.

This presentation will discuss the Parent Navigator program, its development and potential sustainability.