

The LACES Brief

July
2010

An update on the Los Angeles County Evaluation System, An Outcome Reporting Program

Process improvement strategies provide industries with a method for improving outcomes and performance at a low cost and with minimal training. In Los Angeles County, two process improvement projects were implemented as a way to improve access to and engagement and retention in alcohol and other drug abuse treatment. A qualitative evaluation was completed after the Phase II pilot project to assess how the providers felt about the project, what worked, what did not work, what they learned, and the degree to which process improvements changed how they conducted business. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 33 individuals, representing every level of staff participation in the project. Overall, comments indicated a positive experience for staff, administrators, and clients. Below are selected findings from the paper illustrating participant responses to participating in the NIATx process and its benefits.

- Over half of the respondents had heard of NIATx in general terms or knew specific process improvement strategies prior to agreeing to take part in the project, but the majority had no previous experience implementing rapid cycle change projects.

“Overall, I think it helps staff to remember and focus on what we’re here for, we’re here to serve clients in the community who suffer from substances, mental health, and other problems and really making those services accessible to those people in the community and how we could do that in terms of being available and having staff available.”

- Participating agencies were asked to identify a key issue or problem that would serve as the focus of their improvement efforts. The key issue was to be based on one of the four NIATx aims:
 1. Decrease wait-time
 2. Decrease no-shows
 3. Increase admissions
 4. Increase continuation

By the conclusion of the project, at least one Change Team had decided to focus on each of the four NIATx aims, and in several instances, agencies chose to focus on multiple aims throughout the 6-month change-project implementation period.

“We wanted to reduce the number of no-shows to in-house

appointments. What we decided to do was place a reminder call the day before. In fact, we not only placed a reminder call the day before, we placed a reminder call the morning of. We made sure that we made direct contact with the client and not leave a message with somebody else. We wanted them to be accountable and hear straight from them. If we didn’t speak to them directly, we would definitely place another call in the morning hoping to get them directly, so that really helped and it brought our no-show [rate down].”

- One Change Leader noted that the change they made to address wait time and no-shows was so successful that they had a higher show rate than they could handle.

“It got to a point that we had to slow the pace a little bit because it was taking me away from my responsibilities as program director. We had...[to] slow it up a little bit, but we were so excited.”

- Overall, the responses to the project were overwhelmingly positive. Most providers expressed interest in continuing with process improvement and/or participating in future projects that are initiated by UCLA or SAPC.

“I personally think it’s a really good process that would really help agencies, particularly for folks who are struggling financially. I think it’s a way for them to look at streamlining their services [in a way] that could save them some critical funding and resources, and it would be nice [if] it was something that was emphasized.”

An article reviewing the qualitative findings will be published in the Fall. In addition, LACES is planning for future NIATx projects - more info to come...