Behavioral Health and Informatics: Improving Program Performance and Population Health Outcomes

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**Background**

In 2014, the WA State Legislature passed Senate Bill 6312 to integrate public funding for mental health and substance use disorder treatment services. In response to this integration, Whatcom County Health Department (WCHD) prioritized the need to enhance the current behavioral health data and information infrastructure to better support staff and community partners’ needs and to improve program and population health outcomes. The current methods for data collection, analysis, and dissemination of the WCHD Human Services programs are fragmented and silo-based. In result, creating communication challenges among programs and inhibiting the demonstration of the comprehensive impact of interventions across behavioral health programs.

**Methods**

Capitalizing on being a Project SHINE Fellowship host site, the 2016-2017 Informatics-Training In Place (I-TIPP) Fellow project was dedicated to developing well-designed behavioral health data and information systems that support staff and community partner needs. WCHD staff and SHINE Fellow utilized the Collaborative Requirements Development Methodology to apply a practical application of the business process analysis to upgrade systems to provide actionable information as it relates to behavioral health promotion, substance use disorders, mental health, and homeless housing. Informatics tools such as context diagrams, business process matrix and issue management register have served as planning tools, conversation starters, and engagement of staff in information and data management enhancements.

**Results**

The result of using informatics tools to examine program efficiency and data collection and usability has assisted in identifying significant gaps in data infrastructure, program disruptions, and possible solutions for program improvement and delivery of services. The need to increase data infrastructure, program disruptions, and possible solutions for program improvement and delivery of services. The need to increase public funding for mental health and substance use disorder treatment services. In 2014, the WA State Legislature passed Senate Bill 6312 to integrate public funding for mental health and substance use disorder treatment services. In response to this integration, Whatcom County Health Department (WCHD) prioritized the need to enhance the current behavioral health data and information infrastructure to better support staff and community partners’ needs and to improve program and population health outcomes. The current methods for data collection, analysis, and dissemination of the WCHD Human Services programs are fragmented and silo-based. In result, creating communication challenges among programs and inhibiting the demonstration of the comprehensive impact of interventions across behavioral health programs.

**Conclusions**

To successfully improve behavioral health program performance and population health outcomes it is imperative first to understand how programs currently function, and how and where data and information are collected, utilized and disseminated. Application of informatics tools and strategies allows for a mapping of these systems and provides the opportunity to identify program and data management inefficiencies and the steps needed for improvements. Information gathered from this project will help to inform the creation of information systems that promote communication and integration and provide automated routine analysis and decision support queries. Future direction also includes expanding the utilization of informatics tools for contract management, and the community health assessment and improvement plan.

**Successes**

The success of the project has been in support of the department’s leadership and staff and their commitment to the WCHD’s strategic goals of 1) data and compassion drive our decisions and 2) our workforce is fully supported and engaged. Success is linked to the dedicated time researching, learning and following select public health informatics frameworks and tools. These tools served as useful guides and resources and assisted in planning and generating meaningful conversations.

**References**

4. Public Health Informatics Institute. Designing and Managing Public Health Information Systems On The IT Lifecycle. More information contact, Amy Hockenberry at ahockenberry@whatcomcountywa.us

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