

Identifying and Building Health Service Integration Initiative Champions

Description:

This tool provides an overview of champions, describes the attributes, and suggests an orientation process.

How it can be used:

Seeking improvement through a health service integration initiative can be a challenging prospect. Finding and developing champions that will build awareness of the work and promote the benefits can make the difference between a successful result and a mediocre result (or worse). A health service integration initiative, by its nature, brings together disparate activities and partners to build a stronger continuum of care. Including champions during planning and implementation will help you build understanding and bridge the differences between stakeholders.

What are champions?

Champions are individuals who make a commitment to the health service integration initiative and actively promote the concepts and practices. It might be a formal “position” or an informal role that helps to raise awareness for the work and bridges differences by bringing diverse points of view to a common place.

Why develop champions?

Champions can be invaluable in building consensus among stakeholders with diverse interests, or for garnering organizational support for changes. Best practices in change management note that having champions who believe in and promote the change are a key factor in the success of any initiative. All health service integration initiatives are based on something changing; therefore the development of champions for your initiative will be very important.

What attributes does a champion have?

Seek out champions who demonstrate behaviours such as:

- actively and enthusiastically promotes new practices and innovation;
- makes connections between different groups of people;
- navigates the social and political environment;
- builds support for innovation through sharing their vision;
- enjoys facing up to challenges;
- sees and helps to overcome resistance.

However, depending on your health service integration initiative, you might require a specialized skill or experience, perhaps related to cultural practices.

Orienting a champion.

Champions need to be clear on what is expected of them. Consider the following approaches to formally orient the champion(s) in your health service integration initiative:

- individual discussions where the role of the champion is discussed;
- small group coaching calls;
- larger group learning workshops;

- full day ‘champion sessions’ where champions can meet and share intentions and commitment. (This is more relevant for larger health service integration initiatives where there may be several champions).

Role of a champion

The role of champions differs depending on the type of project. For your health service integration initiative, you might need someone to make presentations at meetings, or to take the concepts up to leadership. As champions are typically involved in networks, they can be valuable conduits of information and promote new concepts. The role of the champion(s) should be discussed in your working group with consideration of the value they bring to the health service integration initiative. For instance, is there a special group that may be resistant to the health service integration initiative? You might seek a champion to support the work from that group; someone who can help facilitate the changes from within.

Considerations

A champion may be successful at facilitating change at one level (e.g., community, regional or national) but not at others. When possible, champions should be engaged at multiple points of influence to prevent advocacy bottlenecks and to amplify their collective effect.

- Financial or in-kind support may enhance the likelihood that health service integration initiative objectives will be achieved.
- Select individuals who are current opinion leaders.
- Ensure the level and type of champion corresponds to the desired health service integration initiative outcome. For example, advocacy activities by community-based champions would differ in scope to those of a national-level champion.
- Consider providing multiple types of support to champions, including access to financial, technical and capacity-building assistance.
- Implement strategies to prevent or address fatigue among champions.
- Encourage champions to develop a local network of supportive peers as an alternative to an externally facilitated network.