

# Pathway to Wellness: Linkage Demonstration Project Bridges Unmet Health Care Needs to Referrals

People with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) have poorer experiences accessing health services, more unmet health care needs, and greater need for care coordination. MTDH utilizes this Linkage Project to help participants identify unmet health care needs and create health/wellness goals. Goals include resources to get recommended routine health care that can prevent diseases like cancer, help participants join health education and wellness classes, and help improve access to basic needs.

## The Linkage Demonstration Project in Montana

Our initial strategy was to work with existing partnerships to recruit and train Developmental Disabilities Targeted Case Managers (TCMs) as Linkage Coordinators and request that they each recruit one participant to enroll in the project, detailed in a one-day training. Even though MTDH staff regularly updated TCMs on the project through presentations, calls, and email and offered support for their participation, we were still not meeting targets as outlined by our cooperative agreement. In Year 3, the MTDH staff pivoted strategies to partner with local Centers for Independent Living and Developmental Disabilities Service Provider Organizations to engage interested individuals through group Linkage Workshops. To effectively partner, MTDH staff became the Linkage Coordinators, Dr. Meg Ann Traci and her graduate assistant, Allie Brock with the Rural Institute for Inclusive Communities, and Erin Bley, with DPHHS.

## Implementing Linkage Workshops

A typical Linkage Workshop lasted about two hours. The MTDH staff met virtually with organization staff and potential participants to ensure that participants were eligible and comfortable participating. MTDH staff Linkage Coordinators would start workshops with a sign-in sheet and W-9 form completion for honorarium (participants receive \$25 honoraria for Session One and the 3-month follow-up session). Workshop Group Activities: Eligibility, Health Knowledge Assessment, and Health Education. Individual appointments were finished in a private room or scheduled virtually to complete Session One.

## Tools

Meg Traci and Allie Brock developed a toolkit to increase fidelity, efficiency, and participant success. Among the 13 products in the toolkit are 1) A script for screening, enrolling, and completing Session One with the groups, 2) a 'Thank you' letter with written wellness goals and linkages, and 3) a 'how to use a QR code' sheet to support access of educational videos.

## Impact

Forty-nine participants have been enrolled in the Montana Linkage Demonstration Project. Nine recruited through convenience, ten recruited by one DDP Case Manager, and 30 recruited through the Linkage Workshop partnerships. Twelve participants have successfully completed the program. MTDH held five Linkage Workshops in five cities. Twenty-nine linkages have been made, 15 preventive health, 10 health promotion, 1 mental health, and 3 other unmet needs. Twenty-nine linkages out of 148 referrals = 20% successful linkages made by all participants addressing 12% of overall unmet needs.

## Sustainability

MTDH still builds capacity with TCMs by inviting them to local Linkage Workshops. MTDH also promotes the Linkage Program at meetings with Centers for Independent Living staff and the Community Planning Group to engage interested participants.