

## MONITORING AND EVALUATION FOR COMMUNITY PREVENTION SYSTEMS

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) are essential in strengthening Community-Based Prevention Implementation Systems, through this process organizations collect and analyze data, and determine if the Substance use prevention- intervention (EBIs) is attaining (has fulfilled) its desired goal. Monitoring begin right away from inception and extends through program or project life like process or outcome evaluation. “*Evaluate what you want because what gets measured gets produced*” said James Belasco. Every organization need to have monitoring and evaluation system in place because of the following motives;

- **Promotes transparency and accountability;** because organizations track, analyze and report on the program or project, information is freely available to stakeholders, which gives them more input on the program. A good monitoring system ensures no one is left in darkness. This transparency leads to better accountability.
- **Helps organizations to identify problems early** for example process evaluation with check how well the program activities are delivered, determine the degree to which an EBIs was implemented as planned, and the extent to which it has reached the targeted population. It helps the program or project to stay on track and perform to expected standards. Monitoring and evaluation plan will help to define the project scope, establish interventions when things go wrong and give everyone an idea of how those interventions affect the rest of the program and a quick solution is provided.
- **Ensure effective use of program resources;** Every EBIs need resources, how much cash is on determines things like how many staff to work on the project. Data collected reveals capacity gaps or issues for example how facilitators deliver the material, how participants respond to the program. Without this data it can't be clear what areas need to be a priority and prevent that waste.
- **Facilitates learning from mistakes made;** mistakes and failures are part of every organization. M&E provides a detailed blueprint of everything that went right and wrong during the program implementation. Data collected and analyzed allow the team to identify specific EBIs failures, as opposed to just guessing what caused problems.
- **Improves decision making;** M& E data drive decisions, its processes provide vital information needed to see the big picture for example on the success of drug use prevention interventions. Periodical evaluation help teams to identify gaps, success and things that can be adapted and replicated for future programs. Decision making in then influenced by what was learned through the current and past evaluation. “*One of the great mistakes is to judge policies and program by their intentions rather than their results*” said Milton Friedman.
- **Supports community teams be systematized;** by developing a good M&E Plan requires a lot from the organization, the process is very helpful because it has to develop

methods to collect, distribute and analyze information on EBIs. This requires organizations to decide on desired outcomes of selected and adopted EBIs, how to measure success, and how to adapt as the program goes on.

- **Aids the community teams to replicate achievable substance use prevention EBIs;** Organizations don't like to waste time on programs that fail to meet certain required standards that is M& E enable organization to replicate evidenced based interventions for example community care plus, Promoting School community University Partnership to Enhance Resilience (PROSPER).
- **It Boosts Innovation;** by fueling innovative thinking and methods for data collection. While some fields require specific methods, others are open to more ideas for example some field that have traditionally relied on standard tools like questionnaires, focused group discussion, interviews, and so on can branch out to video and photo documentation, storytelling among others. Innovative tools provide new perspectives on data and new ways to measure.
- **It encourages diversity of thought and opinions;** with monitoring and evaluation, the more information the better; every team member offers an vital perspective on how a program is doing. Encouraging diversity of thought and exploring new ways of obtaining feedback enhance the benefits of M&E for example surveys are only truly useful if they include a wide range of people and responses. That is a good monitoring and evaluation plans, all voices are important whether small or big organization to determine the effectiveness of EBIs. *"We want the facts to fit the preconceptions. When they don't it easier to ignore the facts than to change the preconception"* Jessamyn West

Evaluation has enormous potential to help improve individual, families and communities by influencing policy makers, other stakeholders and public opinion on substance use prevention through ensuring that public policies, programs and process are informed by sound evidence to address factors that increase likelihood of substance use or other problem behaviours (EvalAgenda 2020). *"True genius resides in the capacity for evaluation of uncertain, hazardous, and conflicting information"* said Winston Churchill.

To have Sustainable Community-Based Prevention Implementation Systems, we need to develop monitoring and evaluation plan that aims to create an enabling environment for substance use prevention teams to understand and appreciate it's values, provide sufficient resources, use credible data collecting system to make evaluation findings readily available, involve stakeholders to receive and utilize evaluation information. "Absence of evidence is not evidence" said Carl Sagan. As Substance use Prevention Professionals, we need to develop institutional capacities to facilitate quality monitoring and evaluation, networking and securing resources to sustain quality implementation of Evidence based interventions.

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