INPOWR informs and improves the ongoing implementation of the VHA Innovators Network.

The QUERI INPOWR Partnered Evaluation employs quantitative and qualitative methods to inform and improve VHA Innovators Network (iNET). INPOWR’s key impact has been development of quarterly data reporting structures, supporting iNET in meeting participant needs, tracking and reporting progress. In Fy19, INPOWR documented that one-quarter of iNET sites had initiated contact with the VA Technology Transfer Program, INET trained over 8,000 employees and impacted over 120,000 Veterans.

Overview

The VHA Innovators Network (iNET) teaches and trains VA employees on innovation-related competencies, creates an innovation development pathway through the Spark-Seed-Spread (S-S-S) funding program, and supports the Diffusion of Excellence (the other signature program of the VHA Innovation Ecosystem, which helps identify and disseminate best practices). This expanding network currently includes 33 sites nationwide.

iNET provides:
- Training to develop core competencies and toolkits
- Training for Innovation Specialists
- Engagement and outreach to support innovation development, beginning with prototype development, through pilot initiative, and finally deployment and implementation.

The INPOWR evaluation is designed to provide rapid and frequent feedback to iNET partners on the following questions:

Implementation Strategies

The INPOWR team uses mixed methods to evaluate iNET. INPOWR specific aims include:

1) Examine Innovators Network site characteristics and expectations for impact (site & project)
2) Measure the impact of Innovators Network site participation, using mixed methods; and
3) Measure the impact of Innovators Network projects, including factors associated with success, sustainability, and return on investment.

Finding Highlight-Characteristics of Participating Sites:

In June, 2019, we presented results showing that there is greater participation among more complex facilities, but there is not an association with facility-level quality metrics.
INPOWR Key activities include:

- Develop meaningful **metrics for project success** across diverse projects
- Inform milestone tracking for project implementation
- Provide training on data collection for reporting to Innovation specialists and project leads
- Conduct **qualitative interviews with 50 key iNET participants and stakeholders across 15 VA sites** focused on perceptions of the value of the Network.
- Map responses to qualitative interviews to the broader literature on theories of innovation
- Develop and implement a **social network analysis**, studying growth and patterns of connection within network participants
- Complete an **in-depth cost accounting** of training activities conducted at sites integrating Intermediate Care Technicians (ICTs) into clinical care (an iNET project).
- **Track the impact of COVID** on iNET participation, project adaptations and outcomes
- Understand how iNET participation prepared employees to contribute to the COVID response.

**Impacts**

Since 2016, INPOWR has provided:

1. Guidance on developing structures to support iNET program implementation and sustainment,
2. A systematic method for tracking project success, collecting information on barriers and facilitators to project implementation, and documenting the impact of participation in the Network (e.g. training and skills development, technology transfer activity, employee engagement, development of national connections)
3. Key findings to advise and improve ongoing implementation of Innovators Network and
4. Critical information used regularly by iNET leadership in presentations to stakeholders including VISN leaders, Central Office leadership and frontline employees.

Reported back on the Benefits of iNET Participation

- iNET participants in diverse roles value the program for its intangible support as a network. Many interviewed employees reported that **participation has been a transformative and positive experience.**
- Network Analysis showed that Innovation Specialists play a critical role in initiating, building and sustaining connections across the iNET network. **By breaking down professional and geographic silos, iNET addresses barriers to innovation and employee engagement.**

**Recently pivoted to examine iNET and the COVID-19 pandemic.**

- **Innovation Specialists were able to contribute their skills** through: 3D printing for masks/face shields, coordination of mass communication to Veterans, support for telehealth and other forms of remote communication (iPads for patients in isolation).
- **Project leads described creative adaptations to the COVID-19 pandemic**, shifting existing programs to meet new needs (e.g., rideshare program transporting Veterans to jobs shifted to deliver essential supplies to Veterans), adapting to new technology platforms (e.g. using VVC for group therapy) and shifting target population (e.g. focusing resources on supporting staff under duress).

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