



What is Navigation?

Those of us who have been in the industry for any length of time are well aware of the supports available to people experiencing homelessness.

- **Outreach workers** help people survive the difficult conditions of living on the streets and encourage them to engage in services which may eventually end their homelessness.
- **Case managers** create individualized case plans limited to the scope of work of one particular organization or agency.
- **Natural supports** include friends, family, neighbors, colleagues, and mentors. They prevent isolation and provide social connections, advice, entertainment, and companionship.

Navigation borrows from all three and blends them together to create a new service delivery system.

So what makes Navigation a unique concept?

1. **It is participant-centered and dynamic.** A Navigator's work is completely customized to meet the unique needs of each participant and it is based on the participant's active participation. With personal first-hand experience and professional training in mental health, substance use and homelessness, Navigators use a variety of behavioral health assessment tools to help identify needs and critical concerns. That being said, there is no formal "case plan" – the Navigator is flexible and nimble and works to meet the immediate needs of each participant as the needs emerge.
2. **Recovery principles are utilized.** Recovery is not simply an absence of symptoms or having an apartment, but a process of reclaiming a satisfying life. Drawing on principles from the behavioral health fields, Navigators provide recovery-oriented care with a focus on creating meaning and purpose in one's life and reclaiming identity and belonging to a community.
3. **The scope of work is unlimited.** This starts with navigating the housing process with local housing authorities, housing programs and landlords, assisting the participant to secure housing and transition back into the community. Once housed, Navigators do "whatever it takes" to keep participants stably housed and improve their quality of life. This may mean driving a participant to the Department of Motor Vehicles to complete an application for an identification card. It may mean taking a participant fishing or to a baseball game to end social isolation. It may involve visiting the gravesite of a loved one or reaching out to estranged family members and helping to rekindle relationships.
4. **Services supplement those already in place.** A participant may have a Case Manager through the Veteran's Administration or Behavioral Health Provider, a Case Manager through a shelter, a Benefits Specialist through the government, and a companion. The Navigator does not replace any of these. Instead, the Navigator works with and among all of these. In essence, they are the dots and the Navigator helps to connect those dots. Additionally, the Navigator fills any gaps in the system by providing the support beyond the scope of work of these individuals.
5. **Navigators provide continuity of care.** A Navigator's work begins while a participant is experiencing homelessness (either on the streets or in shelter), continues while he/she moves into housing, and supports the participant while housed. The relationship continues throughout the participant's journey and does not begin and end based on program status or length of stay. Navigators attempt to create healthy friendships with participants to include celebrating birthdays, holidays, etc. Navigators initially often work harder for the participant than they can work for themselves with the goal of shifting responsibility as the participant gains stability and self-sufficiency.