Training the Future Health Navigator Workforce: A Vocational Pathway for Peer Health Navigators in Australia

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BACKGROUND

Peer Health Navigators (PHNs) support individuals from underserved communities to access and navigate the health and social care system. To professionalise and standardise this emerging role, the Health Navigation Workforce Training Initiative led by Northern Health, Swinburne University of Technology, and Medibank developed Australia's first formal vocational training program tailored to PHNs.

AIM

To co-design and deliver a contextually relevant Certificate III in Community Services that equips PHNs with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to support diverse communities across hospital and community settings.

METHODS

- Systematic review of international literature on PHN roles and training

- Interviews with 16 patients and 15 managers/employers and National academic experts

- Focus groups with 3 stakeholder groups including PHNs, health professionals, and private sector partners

- Six Co-design workshops with community bicultural representatives

COURSE STRUCTURE

12 units (5 core, 7 electives) and 33 modules. The course is available on the TVSC Hub: CIII in Community Services: Swinburne (2025) [WTIF].

CORE UNITS

1. CHCCCS016 Respond to client needs
- Equips PHNs to identify, assess, and respond to individual client needs while supporting autonomy and engagement.

2. CHCCOM005 Communicate in health/community
- Develops effective and respectful communication skills tailored to healthcare and community settings, including verbal, non-verbal, and written forms.

3. CHCDIV001 Work with diverse people
- Builds understanding of cultural diversity and promotes inclusive practices when supporting clients from varied backgrounds.

4. HLTWHS002 Follow safe work practices for direct client care
- Trains PHNs in health and safety, including infection control, manual handling, and managing environmental risks.

5. HLTWHS006 Manage personal stressors in the work environment
- Focuses on strategies for recognising, managing, and minimising the impact of workplace stress.

ELECTIVE UNITS (SELECTED)

6. CHCMHS001 Work with people with mental health issues
- Prepares PHNs to support clients experiencing mental health conditions with empathy and awareness.

7. CHCDIV002 Promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural safety
- Deepens understanding of historical and cultural factors to provide respectful and safe care.

8. CHCCCS038 Facilitate the empowerment of people receiving support
- Encourages practices that foster independence, confidence, and self-determination in clients.

9. CHCCCS019 Recognise and respond to crisis situations
- Provides skills to identify signs of crisis and take appropriate actions to ensure safety and support.

10. CHCADV001 Facilitate the interests and rights of clients
- Equips PHNs to advocate effectively for clients' needs and rights within complex service systems.

11. CHCCCS001 Address the needs of people with chronic disease
- Covers support strategies for clients managing chronic health conditions, with a focus on prevention and care coordination.

12. CHCPRP005 Engage with health professionals and the health system
- Strengthens collaboration with multidisciplinary teams and fosters confident navigation of health service structures.

Northern Health