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Hello, we are Emily Lauer and Courtney Dutra from the University of Massachusetts Medical School's Center for Developmental Disability Evaluation and Research (CDDER). We have designed and conducted a number of evaluations of programs and projects for elders and people with disabilities. In this post, we focus on the topic of person-centered evaluations. We have found this type of evaluation to be one of the most effective strategies for evaluating aging and/or disability services, as it tends to provide results that are more valid and useful through empowering consumers in the evaluation process.

Why person-centered evaluation?
Traditional evaluations tend to use a one-size-fits-all approach that risks supplanting judgment about consumers' individual perspectives and may not evaluate components that consumers feel are relevant. In a person-centered evaluation, consumers of the program's or project's services are involved throughout the evaluation process. A person-centered evaluation ensures the program or project is evaluated in a way that:
- is meaningful to consumers;
- is flexible enough to incorporate varied perspectives; and
- results in findings that are understandable to and shared with consumers.

Lessons Learned:

Key steps to designing a person-centered evaluation?

1. **Design the evaluation with consumers**
   Involve consumers in the development process for the evaluation and its tools.

2. **Design evaluations that empower consumers**
   - Utilize evaluation tools that support consumers in thinking critically and constructively about their experiences and the program under evaluation. Consider using a conversational format to solicit experiential information.
   - Minimize the use of close-ended questions that force responses into categories. Instead, consider methods such as semi-structured interviews that include open-ended questions which enable consumers to provide feedback about what is relevant to them.
   - Consider the evaluation from the consumer's perspective. Design evaluation tools that support varied communication levels, are culturally relevant, and consider the cognitive level (e.g. intellectual disabilities, dementia) of consumers.

3. **Involve consumers as evaluators**
   Consider training consumers to help conduct the evaluation (e.g. interviewers).

4. **Use a supportive environment**
   In a supportive environment, consumers are more likely to feel they can express themselves without repercussion, their input is valued, and their voices are respected, resulting in more meaningful feedback.

   Tip: Conduct the evaluation interview in a location that is comfortable and familiar for the consumer. When involving family or support staff to help the consumer communicate or feel comfortable, ensure they do not speak "for" the consumer, and that the consumer chooses their involvement.

5. **Involve consumers in synthesizing results**
   Involve consumers in formulating the results of the evaluation.

Rad Resource:

Use Plain Language to write questions and summarize findings that are understandable to consumers.

Many strategies exist to elicit feedback from consumers who do not communicate verbally. Use these methods to include the perspective of these consumers.