San Francisco
HIV Community
Planning Council

2024 San Francisco EMA Ryan White HIV

STANDARDS OF CARE

PHYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

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Overview and Purpose of Psychosocial Support Services Standards

The San Francisco HIV Planning Council developed the Psychosocial Support Services Standards of Care to ensure that people living with HIV (PLWH) in San Francisco are receiving culturally competent, trauma-informed and non-judgmental services that help them cope with their diagnosis and any other psychosocial stressors they are experiencing.

The purpose of psychosocial support services is to remove or lessen client barriers to care and treatment, increase client self-efficacy, and ensure access to a broad-based support system through counseling services and mental health support. Psychosocial support services provide group or individual support and counseling services to assist people with HIV to address behavioral and physical health concerns and access a safe space where lived experiences and challenges can be discussed without judgement. Psychosocial support services are client-centered and may include individuals who are newly diagnosed, newly identified as living with HIV, or who require additional support to engage in and maintain HIV medical care and supportive services. The objective of psychosocial services is to not only provide counseling and support services, but to ensure clients are linked to care and continuously supported to remain in care.

Description of Psychosocial Services

Psychosocial support services provide group or individual support and counseling services to assist eligible people living with HIV to address behavioral and physical health concerns. Psychosocial support services are associated with improved engagement in HIV care for the purpose of improving health outcomes. Agencies are expected to prioritize services to individuals who are having difficulty remaining engaged in HIV care.

Key activities of Psychosocial Support Services may include:

- Support and counseling activities;
- HIV support groups ;
- Nutrition counseling provided by a non-registered dietitian (see Medical Nutrition Therapy Services for services provided by Registered Dietitians);
- Client navigation and education services;
- Child abuse and neglect counseling;
- Pastoral care/counseling services;

- Bereavement counseling; and
- Volunteer support.

HCP-funded pastoral counseling must be available to all eligible clients regardless of their religious denominational affiliation.

Funds under this service category may **not** be used to pay for:

- Nutritional supplements (see Food Bank/Home Delivered Meals Standards of Care);
- Social/recreational activities;
- Gym memberships; or
- Psychotherapy services provided by a licensed mental health provider (see Mental Health Services Standards of Care).

A key component of psychosocial support services for PLWH and those affected by HIV is to provide services that are centered on **trauma-informed care.** Psychosocial services also provide a strength-based framework that emphasizes physical, psychological, and emotional safety for both providers and survivors, and creates opportunities for survivors to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment.

Units of Service:

A Psychosocial Support Unit of Service is defined as:

- A 15-minute contact between a client and a counselor or other provider of allowed psychosocial support services. When clients attend group-related services, sign-in sheets should be maintained and UOS should be allotted for each client (e.g., if five clients attend a one-hour support group, the service should be recorded for each client as four units at 15 minutes each).

Psychosocial Services Requirements:

Psychosocial services programs and providers must provide the key activities listed below:

Intake and Assessment:

Each new client enrolled in Psychosocial Support Services must receive an orientation to the services at the first visit; document this orientation in the client file. While treatment plans are not required for this service category, an initial review of client needs, personal support systems, and current services is highly recommended, and an individual service plan may be developed for high-acuity clients facing a range of challenges and needs, and that includes referral and linkage to needed related services.

Service Delivery:

The goal of psychosocial support group services is to provide a forum in which lived experiences, challenges, and health concerns of persons living with HIV can be discussed without judgement. In addition, support groups aim to increase participant knowledge and awareness of HIV-related topics; build a trusting network among participants as well as with the facilitator; and empower participants to maintain their highest level of optimal mental, physical, and emotional health. Topics discussed in support groups include, but are not limited to:

- Living with HIV;
- Healthy lifestyles, including substance use and relationships;
- Adherence to treatment;
- Access and barriers to care;
- Prevention, including PrEP, PEP, and treatment as prevention;
- Disclosing status; and
- HIV stigma.

Psychosocial services providers must ensure a safe, confidential space for participants to discuss topics of interest through group facilitation techniques. Meeting locations must be accessible and affordable for participants. To reduce barriers to accessing care, an agency may offer online counseling and therapy services or telepsychology through phone, webcam, email or text message appointments depending on its capacity and/or contract guidelines. Agencies must comply with established agency confidentiality policies when soliciting information from external sources.