

CULTURAL RELEVANCE

Overview

When we think of success, we don't focus only on sobriety, the typical measurement for addiction wellness. Instead, we consider our members' lives as a whole. Using the Recovery Capital Index (RCI), we evaluate members' wellbeing in social, personal and cultural capitals. Within cultural capital, Face It TOGETHER (FIT) looks at a member's relationship to their beliefs, values, community and spirituality. One of the key metrics within cultural capital is cultural relevance. At baseline, 86% of our members report concerns related to cultural relevance. Almost half (48%) of those with concerns report improvements in this metric once they end their engagement with FIT, regardless of how long they were coached.

Methodology

FIT looked at 564 members who: were struggling with alcohol and other drugs; were engaged in coaching between 1/1/16 and 12/13/2020; and completed an RCI at baseline and at least one follow-up. Of those, 487 (86%) indicated concerns related to cultural relevance within their communities. To focus this brief, 90- and 120-day RCI results were selected and 139 members (25% of those that were struggling at baseline) were included in the analysis. Changes in RCI cultural relevance metrics were compared from baseline to 90 and 120 days. Baseline and follow-up responses were on an ordinal scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree and all metrics were scored from zero to four.

Results

Of the 139 members who were part of this analysis, 50% showed improvement in cultural relevance after 90 days of engagement. After 120 days, this increased to 59% of members. The average percent change from baseline was 16% at 90 days and 14% at 120 days. This analysis looked closer at the individual metrics to better understand the differences in scores between 90 and 120 days. Cultural relevance, one of six sub-components within RCI cultural capital, explores the potential for change in access to culturally appropriate activities, the presence of cultural challenges and positive participation.

Members were more likely to demonstrate a positive change in the metric "access to culturally appropriate activities" at 120 days (35% of members, 19% change in score) when compared to 90 days (22% of members, 9% change in score). This was also true in the metric "cultural challenges to community" (120 days: 32% of members, 24% change in score; 90 days: 27% of members, 11% change in score). Members showed a greater percent change in the metric "positive participation in community" at 90 days (40% of members, 39% change in score) than they did at 120 days (31% of members, 25% change in score).

Figure 1: Percent positive change in cultural relevance from baseline to 90 days and 120 days



Discussion

Relevance in a community, especially from a cultural perspective, is critical for all of us, regardless of the impact that alcohol and other drugs may have had on our lives. Someone struggling with addiction is likely to feel inferior and experience a strong sense of isolation. Because of the stigma surrounding addiction, it is difficult for people to openly share their struggles, even if they are in a place of wellness. Every struggle they come up against (e.g., losing their job, being homeless, strained family relationships, etc.) just exacerbates this feeling of not having a relevant, welcoming community around them. FIT coaches strive to create an atmosphere with no judgment. This safe place to share openly can have a significant impact on someone's view of themselves and how they approach the world around them. Focusing less on what makes them different and more on how they can thrive in a community is one of many priorities of FIT coaches.

Though internal focus is important in early recovery, it can sometimes present a challenge to members' feelings of cultural relevance. Learning to see outside themselves and how they can impact others around them makes a significant difference in their feelings of acceptance. FIT coaches help members discover what their strengths and interests are and encourage them to engage with others who are likeminded. Having an identity outside of their addiction significantly impacts their sense of relevance within their community. It's important for members to learn how to function within a society that may not have been created specifically for them – a place that is not necessarily going to be the safest or most accepting of someone with a history of addiction. FIT coaches have experienced this in their own lives and help members address these obstacles as they begin to rebuild their role in the community.

Figures 2-4: The percent change in individual cultural relevance metrics from baseline to 90 days and 120 days

