

Access to Tailored Autism Integrated Care through Family Navigation (ATTAIN NAV)

ATTAIN NAV was co-designed with caregiver and healthcare partners and delivered by lay navigators to facilitate access to mental health and family support services for school-age children with autism ([NIMH R34MH120190](#)).

The Challenge

- Autistic children have high rates of co-occurring mental health needs, yet they face multi-level barriers to accessing and engaging with needed care^{1,2,3}.
- Primary care is an optimal place for early mental health needs identification and referral to mental health care.
- The Access to Tailored Autism Integrated Care (ATTAIN) study co-created an integrated mental health care model for autistic children in primary care⁴.
- Pilot outcomes indicated high feasibility, acceptability, and utility but more specific and tailored implementation support was needed to expedite and secure engagement with mental health services^{5,6}.

The Approach

- To address the noted challenges, the ATTAIN NAV study adapted a family navigation intervention⁷ for school-age autistic children with co-occurring mental health needs.
- ATTAIN NAV was delivered in weekly sessions over 4 months by trained, lay health navigators, focused on collaborative goal development, motivational interviewing, and problem-solving strategies to promote engagement with health and community services.
- The impact of ATTAIN NAV was tested in a stepped-wedge, hybrid implementation-effectiveness study.

The Impact

- A total of 21 primary care providers enrolled; 157 families were referred via provider or self-referral.
- A total of 65 families enrolled and 56 families completed ATTAIN NAV.
- Most families were connected to needed or requested services and caregivers reported high levels of satisfaction and benefit from ATTAIN NAV.

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

- On average, navigators completed **27 contacts** with families and spent an average of **22 minutes** per contact.
- **90% of families were successfully engaged** with at least 1 needed health or community service by navigation end.
- Families reported **high satisfaction with navigation** ($M = 6.31/7$, $SD = 0.89$) as well as **high satisfaction with referred services** ($M = 5.60/7$, $SD = 1.32$).

Key Benefits



CLINICAL

Therapeutic Procedures - Demonstrated

Provided an efficient and effective intervention to secure engagement with needed health and community services for autistic children.



COMMUNITY

Health Education Resources - Demonstrated

Strengthened caregiver advocacy skills and service navigation knowledge.



COMMUNITY

Healthcare Accessibility - Demonstrated

Family navigation showed potential to help address disparities in access to mental health and community-based care.



POLICY

Policies - Potential

Findings can be used as a blueprint for healthcare policies considering non-traditional mental health providers as essential members of the care teams.

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