

NIATx and the ACTION Campaign



Marin County Division of Alcohol, Drug & Tobacco Programs
10 North San Pedro Road, Suite 1013, San Rafael

NIATx: What is it and why should my organization implement it?

The *Network for the Improvement of Addiction Treatment (NIATx)* is a partnership between the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's *Paths to Recovery* program, the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment's *Strengthening Treatment Access and Retention (STAR)* program, the National Institute on Drug Abuse, and a number of independent addiction treatment organizations. NIATx works with addiction treatment providers to make more efficient use of their capacity and shares strategies for improving treatment access and retention.

What are the Aims of NIATx?

NIATx works with its member organizations and the field at large to improve treatment through organizational changes that address four aims:

1. To reduce the wait time between a client's first request for service and the first treatment session
2. To reduce client no-shows
3. To increase addiction treatment centers' admissions
4. To increase the treatment continuation rate between the first and the fourth treatment sessions

NIATx members create a culture of process improvement in which treatment center staff uses existing resources to improve services, learn innovative strategies through peer networking, and model organizational improvements in addiction treatment. NIATx supports its members' efforts by providing the field of addiction treatment with research, innovative ideas, tools for improvement, case studies, and through conferences, publications, and the Web site, www.NIATx.net.

What are the NIATx Principles?

The five key principles of NIATx are:

1. Understand and involve the customer
2. Fix key problems that keep the CEO awake at night
3. Pick a powerful change leader
4. Get ideas from outside the organization or field
5. Use rapid-cycle testing to establish effective changes

What are the NIATx Results?

As of November 2006, members reported, on average, the following improvements:

- 23.6% reduction in wait times (34 organizations reporting)
- 32.0% reduction in no-shows (29 organizations reporting)
- 25.3% increase in admissions (25 organizations reporting)
- 13.5% increase in treatment continuation from the first to the fourth session (34 organizations reporting)

Questions addressed in the NIATx process:

1. What is it like to be our customer?
2. What are we trying to accomplish?
3. How will we know if a change is an improvement?
4. What changes can we test that may result in an improvement?
5. How can we sustain the improvement?

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What is the ACTION Campaign and How Does it Related to NIATx?

The NIATx model provides guidelines and standards for the improvement of treatment programs, and the *ACTION* (Adopting Changes to Improve Outcomes Now) Campaign provides support, networking and essential tools to implement the NIATx guidelines.

A partnership of several national organizations, the *ACTION* Campaign seeks to increase access and keep clients engaged in treatment through any one of three *ACTIONS* that have been identified by NIATx as the most effective treatment outcome improvement steps:

1. Providing rapid access to services;
2. Improving client engagement, participation and continuation; and
3. Better managing client transitions between levels of care.

All providers may participate in the *ACTION* Campaign. By joining the *ACTION* Campaign, you will have the opportunity to learn basic process improvement strategies, with a goal of implementing specific practices that will improve access and continuation. For additional information, visit www.ActionCampaign.org.

How Can I Implement NIATx in my Treatment Agency?

Implementing the NIATx Model is a significant undertaking, but is also a worthwhile one. The County of Marin believes that the NIATx model would greatly improve treatment outcomes for residents utilizing the County system. Therefore the Division of Alcohol, Drug and Tobacco Programs is encouraging funded providers to undertake the process, and we committed to supporting the work. The first steps in process implementation are:

1. **Gather baseline data.** Participating providers should not expect to have to collect new and extensive information. Rather, be prepared to put together information that should already be available or easily accessed.
2. **Enlist leaders in your organization.** Your staff should be ready to undertake this process, as well. Without their buy-in, any potential improvements may not be sustained.
3. **Do a walkthrough.** Ever wondered what it's like to try to get admitted to treatment at your own organization? How much paperwork is there? Can people get through on the phone? How long do clients have to wait from referral to admittance? These are all topics examined in the walkthrough process.
4. **Draft a plan for changes and improvements.** What would make the whole process smoother?
5. **Implement the changes.** Ask staff to make a change temporarily.
6. **Look at the data again.** Did it work? Are clients being admitted faster? Are they staying longer? What is the no-show rate?
7. **Sustain what worked.** Make the changes permanent, but keep evaluating!

Technical assistance is available through the County of Marin, the *ACTION* Campaign, and other sources. To learn more, please contact Vanessa Kittelson, in the Division of Alcohol, Drug and Tobacco Programs at 415-499-6409 or vkittelson@co.marin.ca.us.