

Introduction to Sustainability Frameworks

Sustainability is a fundamental principle of implementation science. It pertains to the continuous use and influence of evidence-based practices following implementation, ensuring health interventions stay effective over time. Sustainability should be addressed from the planning phase and maintained throughout the implementation process.

Sustaining change requires robust foundations to support planning, stakeholder engagement, and long-term success. Several frameworks and tools are available to help plan for, evaluate, and enhance sustainability in healthcare practice. They can be used together with other theories, models, and frameworks. It is important to remember that there is no single “right” choice when it comes to choosing theories, models, and frameworks. These frameworks and tools can also serve as regular “check-ins” to track progress.

Dynamic Sustainability Framework (DSF)

The DSF was created for complex interventions within complex systems. It considers three interacting components over time: the intervention, the practice setting (context), and the broader system. The DSF emphasises continuous review and adjustment to ensure an intervention remains effective and appropriate for its environment. It helps address issues such as diminished impact (“voltage drop”) and changes in the delivery of an intervention (“program drift”) when transitioning from research to real-world practice. This makes it particularly valuable in rapidly evolving healthcare settings.

Program Sustainability Assessment Tool (PSAT)

The PSAT assesses the sustainability capacity of public health and community programmes. It examines key factors that influence sustainability, including leadership support, partnerships, funding, and evaluation processes. The PSAT helps programme leaders identify strengths and gaps and prioritise actions to improve sustainability.

Clinical Sustainability Assessment Tool (CSAT)

The CSAT is designed for clinical settings and concentrates on maintaining practice changes over time. It considers factors such as clinical outcomes, integration into workflows, and patient and staff engagement. The CSAT promotes involving frontline staff to ensure that sustainability strategies are practical and relevant to daily care. It assists in identifying barriers and supports the creation of customised solutions that enhance long-term effectiveness and efficiency.

NHS Sustainability Model

Developed for the UK NHS, the NHS Sustainability Model offers a practical approach to sustainability and concentrates on three core areas: processes, staff, and the environment. It features a scoring

system to identify strengths and sustainability risks. The model underlines economic, social, and organisational factors that affect long-term success. The NHS Sustainability Model stresses strong stakeholder engagement to foster ownership and accountability. Like the DSF, the NHS model encourages continuous improvement and adaptability, supporting a comprehensive and practical approach to maintaining healthcare change.

References

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