



Lessons learnt from navigators

Conflicts of interest when delivering navigation supports

Who this is for and why

This resource may be helpful for PHN staff and/or the care finder line manager as an additional resource to inform their existing expertise and knowledge.

It is based upon experiences and reflections of Aged Care System Navigators and COTA Australia as part of the Australian Government funded Aged Care System Navigator Trial measure (ACSN).

The official operation of the National care finder program, including management of conflicts of interest, is governed by [care finder policy documentation](#).



What is conflict of interest?

Under the ACSN Trial, a small range of conflicts of interest occurred with navigators and their organisations. For example:

- If the navigator or their delivery organisation received a direct or indirect benefit from a referral made to or from the navigator. This benefit could be seen as influencing, impacting, or restricting the information provided to the customer, and consequently limiting their capacity to make an informed choice.
- At the organisational level – when the organisation was in receipt of funding to run a similar Program to the navigator and/or were delivering direct care services as an aged care provider.
- At the individual level – if the individual providing navigation support also provided services for an aged care service (e.g. care management) or privately ran a fee-for-service or commercial navigation or placement service.

Informed choice for aged care customers depends on the provision of independent, accessible, accurate and up to date information. This principle is essential to person-centred service delivery and the operation of navigator services.

However, sometimes conflict of interest was inevitable, such as for example, if the navigator worked for the only service provider in a remote community.

Navigators had to make customers aware of all choices available and navigator organisations were required to declare any conflicts and management strategies to COTA Australia which then reported this to the Department of Health and Aged Care for advice.

Eliminating conflict of interest by navigator partner organisations and their contractors

During the Trial, it was identified that conflict of interest could potentially occur when a navigator organisation subcontracted to another organisation. COTA Australia implemented the following steps to deal with this conflict:

- Where consortium partners (and their subcontractors) were identified as having a potential conflict of interest, they were asked to document how they would manage it before providing services, e.g., having policies and training for staff to ensure customers were given choices.
- Organisations were expected to document how they maintained navigator program integrity. This included how customers would be recorded, counted and handled discretely from other funded programs, e.g., a different phone line, a dedicated staff member, and promotion on the website outlining the eligibility of each program.
- Providing group and individual support through communities of practice and other meetings.

Case study

Referring to an advocate who works for the same organisation as the Navigator

Lenny is in his late seventies, of CALD background and lives alone. He lives quite a distance away from his family and has not been able to attend social activities with his cultural community due to COVID-19 restrictions. The navigator met with Lenny and discussed his needs. During the discussion, it became apparent that Lenny had been registered with MyAged Care but had not commenced any services.

It also became apparent that Lenny required a formal advocate to speak on his behalf as he had difficulty expressing his views. Lenny was informed about NACAP services and that the local advocate worked for the same organisation as the navigator. Lenny gave his permission for a referral to the advocate who agreed to support Lenny and be present during the reassessment by the Regional Assessment Team.

Lesson from this case study

Potential conflict of interest was avoided in this instance because Lenny was informed about advocacy services, given a choice to select them and benefited from how his interests were prioritised.

Tips for managing conflict of interest by navigators

Ensure navigators understand what constitutes a conflict of interest

- COTA Australia developed guidance on what constituted a conflict of interest and how to limit it. It required each navigator organisation to agree to those arrangements under their contracts with COTA Australia.
- Ensure all staff were familiar with this so navigators were aware of what constituted a conflict of interest, how it could arise and how to manage it.

Disclosure to customers

Before making a referral or providing information, navigators were required to disclose to the customer:

- If the organisation they represent will receive any form of benefit from doing so.
- If the organisation or service the customer is being referred to is part of the same organisation, the navigator works for.

Record and document

COTA Australia required:

- Navigators to record and document when they referred a customer to their organisation and why.
- Navigators to identify and document upfront the additional or other services operated by their organisation they could reasonably refer customers to. For example, the dementia navigator could reasonably be expected to refer their customers to the dementia specialist allied health team operated by the organisation they work for.
- Navigators to identify, where possible, a minimum of 3 service providers for the customer to choose from.
- That a trial site records direct referrals made to their organisation and document any benefits they received in doing so.

Specialist organisations

Some ACSN Navigators worked for specialist organisations such as Older Peoples Advocacy Services (OPAN) and organisations supporting Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and those specialising in Dementia support.

- Navigators noted that some customers preferred to use these services because they met their individual cultural preferences. In other situations, these were the only available service that could meet a customer's specific needs.
- Navigators working in specialist services identified the importance of providing customers with independent, accessible, accurate and up to date information about the range of services available. They noted that if navigators were to be seen as trusted sources of information, they needed to give people choices.
- In circumstances where the navigator directly referred a customer to the navigator's own organisations / services, then a record of this referral was kept. Navigators reported that this was an important for reasons of transparency and accountability.

Case study

Referring to Specialist Support Service

Bill reported to the navigator that his wife had dementia and he was highly stressed. The navigator met with Bill where it became apparent that he required specialist support to assist him in his caring role.

The navigator advised Bill of the Dementia Counselling service and advised him this organisation was also providing the ACSN navigation support.

The navigator took the time to explain why such a specialist service could assist Bill and he agreed to receive the service's dementia-specific counselling support.

Lesson from this case study

As there were no other local Dementia specific counselling services available, so it was appropriate for Bill to be referred to it to meet his needs.