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Background

WIC and First Steps are two of PHSKC's PCH programs that improve perinatal outcomes among families with low income. Historically, WIC and First Steps were run as integrated programs, wherein a staff person was trained to provide services from both programs to a single participant.

Recently, challenges have emerged from program integration:

- Increasing job strain due to COVID-19 and the national infant formula shortage
- Insufficient engagement with First Steps programming due to limited time during appointments
- Suspected lack of awareness and valuing of First Steps services by participants

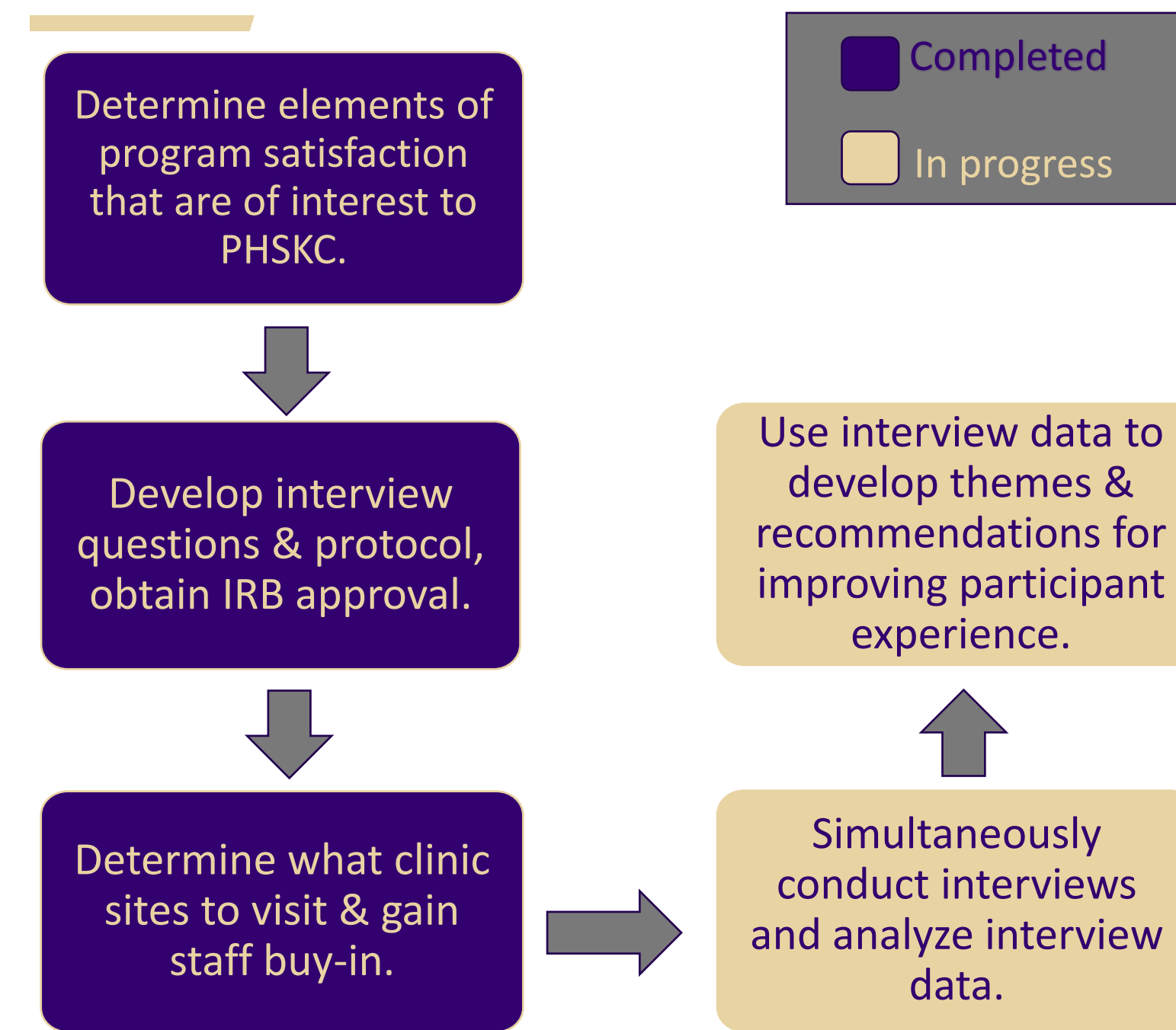
Due to these challenges, PHSKC decided to begin running WIC and First Steps as separate programs as of Nov 1, 2022. I was asked to investigate participants' current satisfaction with WIC and First Steps in the wake of this change.

Objectives

Through ~40 semi-structured interviews:

1. Explore participant's expectations of WIC and First Steps services.
2. Determine the extent to which participants distinguish between WIC and First Steps services.
3. Seek feedback the burdens and benefits of participating in PCH programs, and what they'd like to see from the program(s) in the future.
4. Create a guidebook for staff to use to collect feedback in the future.

Project Timeline



More about WIC & First Steps

Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

- Federally funded block grant program for low-income pregnant and lactating people and children under the age of six
- Provides nutritious foods, infant formula, nutrition counseling, lactation support, and social and health service referrals
- In 2022, about 1 in 3 infants born in WA state were enrolled in WIC.

First Steps

- A Washington Healthcare Authority two-part program, Maternity Support Services (MSS) and Infant Case Management (ICM), covered under Medicaid.
- MSS involves health education and counseling for Medicaid recipients during pregnancy.
- ICM connects parents to medical, social, educational, and other resources to help infants thrive.

Interview Procedure & Guide

Procedure: Program staff invite participants to complete the interview at the end of their appointment. I obtain verbal informed consent and conduct the 10-minute interview.

1. What was the primary reason for your appointment today?
2. Thinking about your appointment today, from scheduling to the end of your visit:
 - > What were some things that went well for you
 - > What were some things that could have been better?
3. Now thinking about [WIC/First Steps] as a whole:
 - > What were you hoping to get out of the program when you signed up?
 - > How are we doing in meeting that expectation?
4. In addition to [WIC/First Steps], there are many other programs/services for parents and young children. How do you decide which to use, and which to put on hold for later?

Analysis

Interview transcripts are coded using an inductive coding approach. Codes are grouped into larger categories which are then used to determine overall themes.



Analysis & Preliminary Findings

- > Participants highly value the tangible benefits that the programs offer; for example: food and baby supplies.
- > As suspected by the PCH program manager, First Steps participants tend to misattribute First Steps services to the WIC program.
- > Interestingly, participants identify that the main barrier to participation in PCH programs is a lack of awareness of what programs and services are available.

Lessons Learned

- > Framing a question so that it captures the desired information and leads to actionable results is a true artform.
- > It is difficult to assess ongoing participant satisfaction of a program in which participants are enrolled for a limited time (for example, only during pregnancy, infancy, or childhood).
- > As an external evaluator, learning about the program history and changes or forces outside of the program itself is just as important as learning the current program operations.
- > Before going through the IRB process, watch the UW IRB 101 training first to help determine what level of approval is needed!