

Every hospital needs a substance use navigator (SUN)

The SUN is the heart and soul of successful treatment for substance use disorder (SUD) working both in the hospital and the community to connect people to treatment. By facilitating low-barrier access to treatment for patients with SUD, SUNs have helped CA Bridge hospitals identify over 10,000 people with SUD, provide rapid treatment for 7 out of 10 of them, and successfully connected 4 out of 10 to ongoing care. If all California hospitals offered SUD treatment and navigation to ongoing care, tens of thousands of people across the state could be positively impacted.

SUNs make a measurable impact on EDs, hospitals, providers, staff, and patients by:

- **Streamlining** care for people who use drugs with more efficient and effective processes
- **Reducing** the number of SUD-related hospital readmissions
- **Improving** provider satisfaction caring for patients who use drugs
- **Saving** lives through facilitating harm-reduction focused, evidence-based care and treatment

How to recruit

There are many organizations that can help identify an exceptional candidate for this role.

- Harm Reduction Coalition
- California Opioid Safety Network
- Mentoring In Medicine and Science
- Local MAT clinic, FQHCs, Departments of Public Health etc.
- Patient Care Navigators, Scribes, Case Managers, Community Outreach Workers, Health Coaches, etc can be trained into the role
- California Association for Alcohol and Drug Educators (CAADE), California Association of DUI Treatment Programs (CADTP), California Consortium of Addiction Programs and Professionals (CCAPP) training programs

The SUN Role

A SUN is embedded within an emergency department (ED) or an inpatient setting to assist patients with SUD and facilitate treatment for opioid use disorder (OUD).

SUNs become experts on regional treatment resources and conduct extensive community outreach to improve linkage and raise awareness about SUD treatment options.

Successful SUNs are flexible and creative problem solvers, able to leverage interpersonal skills to build relationships throughout their hospital and with community organizations, law enforcement, EMS, schools and universities, tribal populations and more.

See [CA Bridge SUN Job Description Template](#)

Salary

Annual salary range for a SUN is between \$45,000 and \$65,000 for a full time position, with benefits included. Part-time hourly SUNs should receive an hourly wage of \$25 to \$35 per hour, with additional adjustments upward based on regional cost of living.

Experience

The ideal SUN is from the community the hospital serves. Prior lived experience with addiction is considered an asset that better equips the SUN to care for patients who use drugs and should not be cause for discrimination against qualified candidates.

Advancement

The SUN should be encouraged to attend additional training, certification, and advancement opportunities similar to comparable positions.

(See *DHCS Counselor Certification Organizations*)

Supervision Options

The SUN can be supervised in a number of ways. The best models have a SUN reporting to a hospital employee. Other possible models include:

- A department manager acts as direct manager and manages activities such as hiring and administrative duties; ED or inpatient clinician champion co-supervises day-to-day activities.
- Staffing group employs the SUN and they are part of the clinical team.
- Hospital MAT program manager is a supervisor for day to day supervision.
- The SUN is embedded into an existing team such as case management or social work.

Get connected

The SUN will need computer and EMR access in order to identify patients who use drugs, document their communication, and include follow up resources in the discharge instructions for patients. They also need a dedicated telephone, which will allow nurses and providers to be able to reach out for help with a patient.

Introduce the SUN to hospital staff

The clinician champion-SUN relationship can be pivotal in the success of a program. It is essential for the clinician champion to introduce the SUN to important stakeholders including ED Clinical staff, nurses, administrative leaders, etc. More information can be found in the *CA Bridge Guide to SUN & Clinician Champion Collaboration*

Spread the word: "MAT is now accessible 24/7 here!"

Awareness of the MAT program and the SUN among hospital staff is an important component of a successful MAT program. Introducing the SUN at staff meetings or huddles and engaging the communications or marketing team to highlight the SUN and their work throughout the hospital can help jumpstart the program. Patient-facing signage and handouts can also be helpful.

Sample Interview Questions

1. *How have you been involved in this community? In your own words, tell us about our patient population here at [hospital].*
2. *Working in a hospital means that some days you will see 0 patients and some days you will see 7 or more. Tell us about how you structure time and manage unpredictable workflows.*
3. *Tell us about a time you supported someone in a crisis.*
4. *A lot of the success of the SUN relies on building relationships with different people including nurses, doctors, community partners, and patients. In your prior work experience, how have you used relationship building to advance a goal or mission?*
5. *We will be collecting data to evaluate our work. What experience have you had with data collection and reporting? Is this something you are interested in?*
6. *This work can be stressful, what do you do to take care of yourself?*

Helpful resources are available at BridgeToTreatment.org/resources

- *FAQ - Substance Use Navigator*
- *SUN Job Description Template*
- *Guide: SUN & Clinician Champion Collaboration*
- *Patient Signage Template*

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