

THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS



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Community Health Workers advocate for individuals and community health needs and assist people in receiving care

Community Health Workers serve populations across North America (US DOL 2022). According to the American Public Health Association, the profession aims to advocate for

underserved and marginalized communities (APHA, n.d.). Persons in this role can occupy positions in community health or public health settings (APHA, n.d.) The efforts of Community Health Workers often led to increased accessibility to services, awareness of services, health recommendations, and improved relationships between the community and service providers (NIH, 2014).

The United States Department of Health and Human Services (2007) defines Community Health Workers as:

“lay members of communities who work either for pay or as volunteers in association with the local health care system in both urban and rural environments and usually share the ethnicity, language, socioeconomic status and life experiences with the community members they serve. Workers provide interpretation and translation services, assist people in receiving the care they

need, give informal counseling and guidance on health behaviors, advocate for individuals and community health needs, and provide direct services such as first aid and blood pressure screening.”

How CHWs work to address health equity

Most Community Health Workers provide services to ethnic minority groups (Swider, 2002). Community Health Workers are considered frontline health professionals (Love et al., 1997). Two significant focus areas for community health workers are maternal and child health and AIDS (Love et al., 1997). Times have changed since 1997 for CHWs. They have begun to focus on all factors that impact health outcomes, and in California, CHWs connect patients to services and attend appointments with those they serve (Hostetter & Klein, 2015). This new concept can be defined as CHW care teams.

In 2000, it was estimated that around 86,000 community health workers played a role in improving health outcomes for American communities (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2007).

These are some of the characteristics and outcomes of the efforts put forth by a community health worker. Thus, the argument is that a community health



CHWs work to connect individuals with healthcare services, including preventative care, screenings, and treatment. They help individuals navigate the healthcare system and overcome barriers to accessing care.

worker is important and plays an essential role in improving health outcomes for all. Community Health Workers have adopted several models of care; member of care deliver team, navigator, screening and health education provider, outreach-enrolling-informing agent and organizer (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2007).

Training for CHWs

In recent years, Community health workers have received significant attention for their efforts in marginalized communities, such as racial and ethnic minorities (CDC, n.d.). Subsequently, pieces of training have been developed. Training for Community health workers has fallen within seven core competencies; bridging/cultural mediation between communities and the health care systems, providing culturally appropriate and accessible health education and information, assuring that people get the services they need, providing informal counseling and social support, advocating for individual and community needs, providing direct services, and building individual and community capacity (Ingram et al., 2011). To obtain a role in the profession, one must have earned a high school diploma or two-year degree.

In 2022, the Department of Health and Human Services invested over 226 million dollars through the Health Resources and Services Administration in launching a training program for community health workers. The program will focus on building the skill set and providing practical experience to participants. The goal of the program is to train around 13,000 community health workers. The deadline

has ended to apply for this training. More information about the training can be found on the Health and Human Services site.

Future of CHWs

Perry and Hodgins (2021) posit that CHWs contributions are essential to achieving progress toward global health goals. These authors share that CHWs are rooted in the community, so the barrier to access is minimized. Additionally, as mentioned previously, a focus area of CHWs is maternal health. CHWs can serve as a part of a community intervention that could avert over two million maternal and child deaths per year (Perry & Hodgins, 2021). CHWs can reduce language and cultural barriers to patients accessing palliative care; this is done because CHWs frequently speak the language of their patients (C-TAC, 2021).

Moreover, CHWs reduce the educational and licensing barrier that marginalized communities face trying to obtain higher education. Subsequently, workers can also provide aspects of palliative care, such as advance care planning. These are a few innovative strategies that CHWs contribute to reducing health inequities in society, and there future is break in creating a just society.

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CHWs are often members of the same community as the individuals they serve. They understand the cultural, linguistic, and social factors that influence health outcomes and are able to provide care that is tailored to the needs of the community. CHWs build relationships of trust with the individuals they serve, which can help to overcome barriers to care and improve health outcomes.