

Community Health Workers

Our Role in Advancing Health Equity

Keshia Roberson MS, RSW



What does it mean to be a Community Health Worker?

Community health workers (CHWs) are frontline healthcare workers who can help achieve health equity. CHWs are trained to navigate systems like health, housing, and legal support, and to link community and clinical services. They are advocates for health equity and social justice, and can help health care organizations improve health care quality.

Community health workers (CHWs) are usually on the frontline offering healthcare information to help people in underserved communities access healthcare.

CHWs have many responsibilities, including:

Outreach

CHWs help members of marginalized communities access healthcare. They may make home visits to high-risk patients, pregnant or nursing mothers, and the elderly.

Health education

CHWs provide health education, interventions, and training to promote client self-management. They educate clients about how to prevent disease and injury, how to access health and human service systems, and how to practice healthy lifestyles.

Advocacy

CHWs advocate for those who need it. They also promote participant empowerment and community engagement.

Communication

CHWs facilitate communication between community members and health and care organizations. They also need to be able to communicate openly and respectfully with peers and supervisors.

Case management: CHWs may conduct participant screenings and assessments if indicated into their job duties

Why is it important to improve community health?

According to the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, the health of a community affects the quality of life of its members.

Community health can impact:

Quality of life

Educational achievement

Crime rates

Life expectancy

Living in unhealthy communities can lead to chronic disease, such as cancers, diabetes, and heart disease. When individuals are healthy, they can fully participate in and contribute to society.

- Community health efforts focus on preventing diseases and controlling the spread of infections. Examples of interventions include: Immunization campaigns, Health education, Regular screenings.
- Community health can also help reduce inequality among their residents. It can help to reduce health gaps caused by differences in race and ethnicity, location, social status, income and other factors that can affect health.
- Working at the community level promotes healthy living, helps prevent chronic diseases and brings the greatest health benefits to the greatest number of people in need,” reports the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Why are community health workers important in achieving better health outcomes in communities?

CHWs are important because they can help bridge gaps between communities and healthcare systems by;

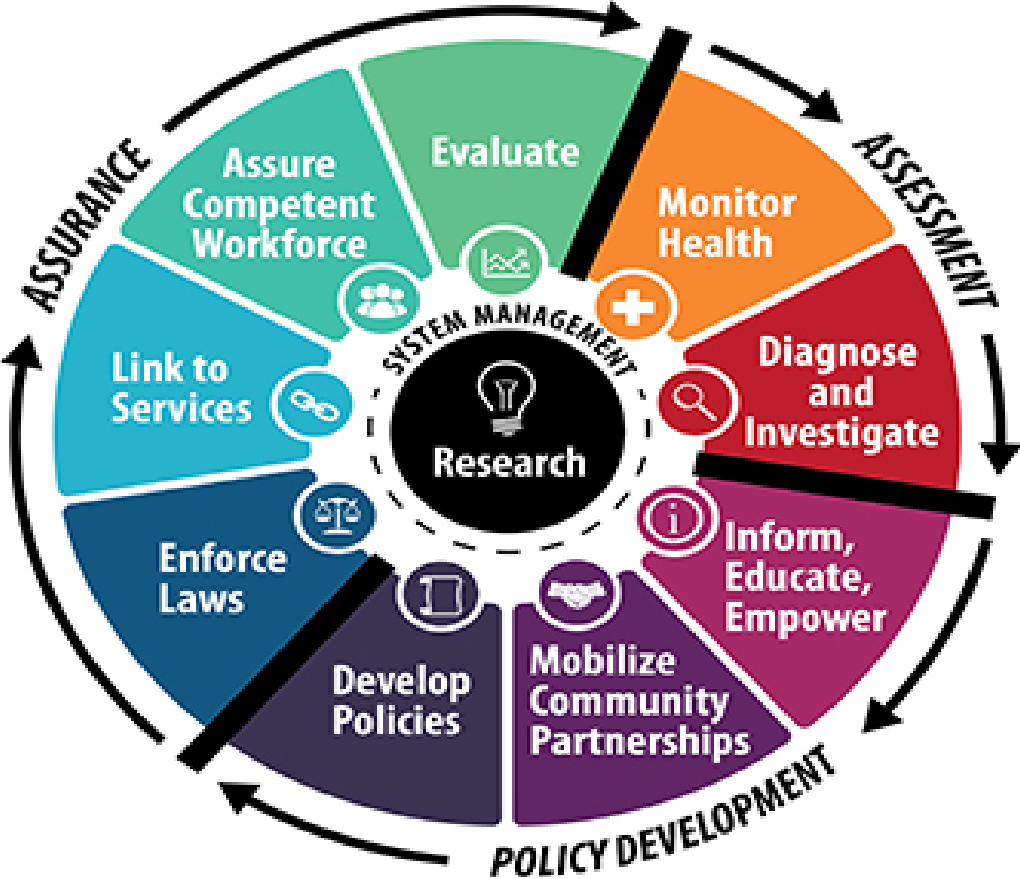
- Improve access: CHWs can help fill gaps in access to primary health care. They can also help connect community members to available services and resources.
- Improve quality: CHWs can help improve the quality and cultural responsiveness of service delivery.
- Improve communication: CHWs can help improve communication between community members and health providers.
- Identify health disparities: CHWs are trained to identify health disparities and understand how they affect communities.
- Improve understanding: CHWs can help improve understanding between community members and the health and social service system.

Continued;

Why are community health workers important in achieving better health outcomes in communities?

- Improve care coordination: CHWs can strengthen care coordination by connecting patients with available healthcare and social support services.
- Reduce social isolation: CHWs can help reduce social isolation among patients.
- Manage care: CHWs can help manage care and care transitions for vulnerable populations.
- Act as a liaison: CHWs can act as a liaison between the healthcare system, patients, and families/caregivers.
- Reduce provider burden: CHWs can help health care organizations reduce provider burden.
- Build connections: Organizations with successful CHW programs build valuable connections to the communities they serve.

Public health practitioners can collaborate with CHWs individually, in coalitions, or in health care teams to enhance the coordination of care within the health care system and social services. Collaborating with CHWs will improve the delivery of prevention and related services and links patients to community resources.



The many titles CHW's are named!

- CHWs are trusted members of their communities. Their job titles, include:
- Community Engagement Specialist
- lay health advocates,
- advisors or partners,
- patient navigators,
- ambassadors,
- self-management coaches,
- outreach educators or workers,
- peer health advisors or promoters,
- peer leaders or counselors,
- community health advisors or representatives.
- And to the Spanish Community, they are called promotoras or promotores de salud (health promoters), and navigator promotoras or navegadores para pacientes.

According to Tulane University, School of Public Health; The public health worker's goal in community-focused care is to enhance healthcare services and patient outcomes in targeted populations. By applying public health theory on a local, personalized level, community health providers can cater services to a specific demographic and bring a sense of wellness to communities that would otherwise lack proper access to care, Tulane University, (2024)..

Community health programs address disparities by ensuring equitable access to health resources. Such disparities include living in an isolated rural area with limited healthcare providers or being unable to afford health insurance. Community health centers often serve as the primary care provider in communities where health equity is limited by socioeconomic factors.

RESOURCE FAIR

Saturday, May 6

9 a.m. - 1 p.m.

East Feliciana Middle School
10410 Plank Road, Clinton

ENJOY FREE:

- Health screenings
- Financial information
- Educational opportunities



Partnering with CHWs to Enhance the Coordination of Care Public health practitioners, in collaboration with CHWs, can improve health outcomes by:

Providing support and counseling:

- o Linking patients with key support services
- o Helping patients' understand and address behavioral and social risks to their health
- o Providing community outreach in needed areas

Addressing barriers and increasing use of services by

- o Translating when language is a barrier
- o Providing referrals for needed services
- o Helping patients understand, in plain language, instructions from health care providers
- o Assisting with lack of transportation, completing required paperwork, or other barriers
- o Identifying more accessible and affordable care for patients

Establishing connections and providing education

- o Improving health care providers understanding of community needs and culture
- o Building capacity of the people and their communities to improve health outcomes
- o Providing health education that is targeted to community needs

Strengthening care

- o Contributing to the continuity and coordination of care
- o Improving self-management of care between physician visits
- o Providing direct health care services, such as basic first aid and conducting health screenings
- o Assisting patients with attending appointments and adhering to medication regimen

The Health and Human Services (HHS) Action Plan to Reduce Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities¹⁵ shows support for CHWs, particularly in diverse and underserved communities. HHS strives to help all Americans have access to quality affordable health care and to control costs within the health care system.

Partnering with CHWs to Advance Health Equity Public health practitioners can partner with CHWs to help provide underserved populations with greater access to health care in the following ways:

- Provide culturally appropriate community health education
- Promote awareness and understanding of health care disparities
- Mediate health care between providers and the community
- Educate health care providers about the health needs of the community and the cultural relevancy of interventions
- Improve cultural competency within the health care system
- Strengthen communication skills of providers and health care system administrators

In Summary!

The process of transforming communities to support and improve their health and quality of life is an important function of public health and the health care system. CHWs can be a valuable resource for public health practitioners to increase the effectiveness of efforts in clinical and community preventive services. The services that CHWs provide vary from community to community. They may be volunteers or trained full-time employees whose goals are to enhance the coordination of care and advance health equity in underserved communities. CHWs foster linkages between the community and the health care and social services systems to provide underserved populations with increased access to culturally competent services. Integrating CHWs into health care teams is a proven option for public health practitioners to consider when working with underserved communities.

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