

Background

How community health workers benefit people's health

It is well known that disparities in health status exist between racial and ethnic groups and the majority population. Using community health workers is recognized as a successful approach for reducing these disparities*. These workers are known by a variety of names, including community health worker, community health advisor, outreach worker, community health representative, promotora/ promotores de salud, patient navigator, peer counselor, lay health advisor, peer health advisor, and peer leader.

Community health workers have a close understanding of the area they serve. This trusting relationship allows them to link people with health and social services. They help increase access to services and improve the quality and cultural sensitivity of health services. They also build knowledge about personal health and self-care in communities through activities like outreach, community education, informal counseling, social support, and advocacy.

Community health workers help health care providers and systems managers build the cultural relevancy of interventions and strengthen their communication skills by educating them about the community's health needs. Community health workers help reduce system costs for health care by linking patients to resources and helping them avoid unnecessary hospitalizations and other forms of more expensive care. The results of this work improve health outcomes for community members.



The System

We have created an online training system for Community Health Workers to strengthen commonly practiced skills, knowledge and abilities.

The role and responsibilities of community health workers is sometimes unclear due to the many duties they perform. The lack of a clear definition of their role can affect care coordination, integrated primary care, and community health teams. To strengthen this system, we created an online training program to strengthen core competencies and health specific skills for this workforce.

The System Structure:

- Attend 2 in person sessions wrapped around six weeks of facilitated online training.
- Training topics include communication, cultural competency, CHW roles and boundaries, organization, documentation, assessment, and service coordination skills among others.
- Receive a certificate of completion
- Upon completion of core competencies, access to 8 additional on-line modules including Breast, Cervical, Colorectal, Prostate Health and Cancer Screenings, Cardiovascular Health, Diabetes, Understanding Disparities & Social Determinants and Navigation Health Insurance. Other modules will be added as funding permits.

How?

The online training is offered quarterly in seven regions across the state. The online training curriculum provides an efficient and easy to access platform that ensures consistency across the state. It is low cost, easy to customize and trains a high volume of workers. Our staff serve as online training facilitators with local health educators serving as co-trainers during the first and final in-person sessions. Check the Department of Health's Community Health Worker website for training times and locations near you. <http://www.doh.wa.gov/chwts>

We are spreading the reach of trained CHWs through shared resources and funding

Through partnerships with the regional Breast, Cervical and Colon Health Prime Contractors and organizations like Comprehensive Health Education Foundation (CHEF) we have:

- Provided core competency training to over 330 CHWs across the state and health specific training to over 60 CHWs.
- Established the training schedule for 2014 with a capacity to train over 500 new CHWs as demand increases in the new health reform environment.
- Begun discussions on the development on new health specific modules including Hypertension & Blood Pressure, Oral Health and Prevention and Asthma.

Our goal is to continue building a sustainable community health workforce.

Provisions outlined in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010 relevant to community health workers will launch over the next four years. By developing this training system, our state will have community health workers positioned for success.

Please contact Scott Carlson, CHW Program Manager at scott.carlson@doh.wa.gov with questions.

**The first patient navigator project was developed by Dr. Harold Freeman, a surgical oncologist at Harlem Hospital, in 1990 after learning that there was a widespread delay in diagnosis of breast cancer among African American women in Harlem. Freeman enlisted members of his community, who were knowledgeable about the health care system, to help patients find their way in the health care system and coordinate services, and resolve the problems that were delaying care. The project was a success.*