

Community Health Workers (CHWs)

Definition: Trusted members of a community who offer a bridge between the healthcare system, social services, and their community to support underserved and under-resourced communities with increasing health knowledge and self-sufficiency through outreach, community education, social support, and advocacy.

Why are Community Health Workers (CHWs) important?

Minority communities have experienced broken trust with healthcare systems, community resources, the government and the public in general through systemic discrimination. Some examples of how this mistrust has been created include the following.

- **Nestle Formula Scandal:** 1960 – 2015; donated formula to low- and middle- income countries; poor ingredients led to malnutrition; 10 million infant deaths; formula dependence created after retracting donations and marking up prices.
- **Forced Sterilization:** 1927; Supreme Court decision led to 70,000 sterilizations of persons considered unfit to procreate; never formally been overturned.
- **Tuskegee Study:** 1932 – 1972; 600 black men were told they were being treated for “bad blood” and given treatment “not considered curative for syphilis” when penicillin was identified as the treatment of choice in 1943.
- **Mental Health Stigma:** negative attitudes, beliefs, and stereotypes perpetuated by structural stigma (laws, regulations & policies), public stigma (individual or groups towards mental health), and self-stigma (internal beliefs).

As trusted persons with local experience and knowledge who are uniquely able to identify problems contributing to health disparities, CHWs within healthcare have been highly successful in improving health outcomes, increasing insurance enrollment, facilitating access to primary care, strengthening the scope and reach of currently established healthcare teams, and enhancing the quality of life for underserved communities—low-income, immigrant, and ethnically diverse (Matos et al., 2011; Martinez et al., 2011; Rosenthal et al., 2010).

How do CHWs impact Clinica’s (CFHW’s) community?

Program Evaluation Team: Provides coordination and support with Continuous Quality Improvement by demonstrating value through outcome measures and other data, grant reporting, assisting with program design through an evaluation lens, and sustainability planning.

Community Health Workers partner with local school districts and community resource organizations to support community members with **1) accessing care and resources, 2) providing education on the system, 3) teaching skills and offering support, 4) networking with other organizations and businesses, and 5) advocating for the community’s needs.** CFHW’s partners have observed CHWs tackle a variety of barriers including cultural barriers, knowledge and education barriers, technology barriers, housing barriers, complex benefit application systems and more. Through attending community events and resource fairs, hosting educational presentations and wellness activities, and providing open hours at trusted community organizations, CHWs have had meaningful connections with 28,000+ individuals and helped many with Medicaid and other applications, obtaining referrals, and initiating access to behavioral and physical health resources.

How can you build your own CHW program to support your community?

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