

Community Health Workers

An Introduction

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Who are community health workers?



Community health workers (CHWs) are trusted members of the community they serve, often sharing at least one characteristic with their patients such as place, race or ethnicity, or health condition. Community health workers act as liaisons between patients, clinical care, and social services.

What are their responsibilities?

All community health workers engage in outreach and health education. In addition, other common responsibilities can include:

Providing enrollment and referral assistance to help patients identify and apply for available services, such as health insurance or assistance programs.

Supporting patient management of chronic conditions.

Promoting healthy behaviors such as adequate nutrition, routine physical activity, and stress management techniques.

Conducting health screenings and needs assessments.

Providing care in a patient's first language.

How are community health workers unique?

Community health workers connect with patients as peers, not only as clients. Their expertise resides in their ability to establish trusted relationships based on shared experience with the population served.

The time CHWs spend providing in-person support allows for greater, more honest communication about patients' health and adherence to treatment and disease prevention strategies. Community health workers strengthen health promotion efforts through their recognition and responsiveness to the culture, beliefs, norms, and behaviors of the communities they serve.



How do they advance health equity?

Community health workers help to advance equity by:

Serving those who are often least connected to the healthcare system.

Providing comprehensive and supportive care.

Prioritizing the social determinants of health.

Ensuring patients are connected to needed services.

Building community capacity by improving patients' health literacy and providing education on how to navigate the complexity of healthcare.

Community health workers are advocates for their patients and the communities of which they are a part.

What is Their Impact?

Improve patient knowledge and patient perceived quality of care

Improve health outcomes, particularly among patients living with a chronic condition such as diabetes, asthma, heart disease, hypertension, and substance use disorder

May reduce frequent hospitalizations and emergency care use, lowering overall healthcare spending