

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.

Who are community health workers?



The term “community health worker” includes a range of other job titles, including but not limited to: patient navigator, peer support specialist, outreach worker, promotor de salud, community health representative, recovery coach and community-based doula. Community health workers strive to increase health knowledge and connections to needed social services through outreach, education, needs assessments, and peer support.

Who are community health workers?

Miscellaneous community and social service specialists, including health educators and community health workers.

78,000
community and social
service specialists including
health educators and
community health workers
are employed in the United
States.

70.8% are women

71.17% are white

22.5% are Black

2.5% are Asian

21.9% are Hispanic

Source: US Bureau Labor Statistics, 2019

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.



Where do they work?

- Health Centers/Federally Qualified Health Centers
- Community-based Organizations
- Local Health Departments
- Hospitals/Health Systems
- Managed Care Organizations*

*Some managed care organizations directly employ community health workers and others contract with community-based organizations that can offer CHW services

In 2020, the average hourly wage for a community health worker was \$22 or \$46,000 annually.

Where do they work?

And not every organization that employs community health workers is directly involved in healthcare. Other organizations that employ CHWs can include:

- Early childhood education agencies
- Child abuse prevention agencies
- Faith-based organizations
- Services for formerly incarcerated individuals and their families
- Emergency preparedness programs

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