

COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS

A Community Health Worker (CHW) is an individual who:

- Serves as a liaison/link between public health, health care, behavioral health services, social services, and the community to assist individuals and communities in adopting healthy behaviors
- Conducts outreach that promotes and improves individual and community health
- Facilitates access to services, decreases health disparities, and improves the quality and cultural competence of service delivery in Nebraska.

A CHW is a trusted member of, or has a good understanding of, the community they serve. They are able to build trusting relationships and are able to link individuals with the systems of care in the communities they serve.

A CHW also builds individual and community capacity by increasing health knowledge and self-sufficiency through a range of activities such as outreach, community education, informal counseling, social support, and advocacy. CHW is an umbrella term used to define other professional titles.

Definition *(Adopted by the NE Community Health Worker Coalition Steering Committee, April 29, 2014)*
(Information from the American Public Health Association, U.S. Department of Labor, Foundations for Community Health Workers, Berthold, Avila, Miller, August 2009)

NE CHW CORE COMPETENCIES

A. Communication Skills

- Ability to use Active Listening
- Ability to communicate in writing
- Ability to communicate verbally

CHWs will communicate with varied populations, individuals, other community health workers, and professionals in a manner that is appropriate for the audience.

Effective cross cultural communication is a central aspect of CHW activity in all areas. They must be able to use relevant languages, be respectful, and demonstrate knowledge of the cultural group(s) they are engaging. They must be able to convey their knowledge base of basic health and social concerns that are meaningful to the clients and families, especially when behavior patterns are deeply rooted in traditions. Sensitivity must be used when attempting to discuss options and reasons for change.

CHWs are required to write and prepare clear reports on their clients, activities, and assessments of individual and community needs. They will be expected to give presentations regarding the needs and

concerns of their clients and communities. Competence in writing and technical skills is expected to increase with experience. CHWs are encouraged to be able to read and write in English, but it may not be essential depending upon their area of focus.

B. Interpersonal skills

- Ability to build relationships
- Ability to work as part of a team
- Ability to understand and work within cultural dynamics

CHWs work with a diverse group of individuals including community members and professionals. They must be able to develop and maintain relationships at all levels. They must be able to work as part of a team, and consider, understand, and respect various perspectives to meet the needs of others.

C. Capacity Building

- Understanding of and ability to apply leadership
- Ability to develop additional skills
- Ability to develop and manage resources
- Ability to use planning skills
- Ability to produce complete, accurate reports
- Understanding of needs assessments

CHWs will increase the capability of their community to be empowered to care for themselves. They will also work collectively with community members and stakeholders to develop plans to increase resources in the community and to expand public awareness of community needs.

D. Teaching Skills

- Ability to teach one-on-one and/or in group settings
- Ability and willingness to learn and be proficient with information being presented
- Ability to lead classes or educational sessions
- Recognize need to continue education
- Ability to adapt teaching style to audience needs

CHWs teach and provide health and social service information and education to individuals they assist. They will effectively support and engage clients and their families in making behavioral changes, following treatment suggestions, and identifying barriers to change that are mutually acceptable and understood by the client, families, and community contact. They will have the ability to make appropriate referrals when needed.

E. Advocacy Skills

- Ability to be assertive and respectful
- Ability to listen and ask questions
- Ability to advocate at different professional levels
- Ability to identify and manage risky situations
- Ability to strengthen social support networks

CHWs must be able to advocate effectively with others so that the individuals they serve are able to receive the services they need. They provide information and support to others and teach them how to advocate for their own needs. They must have knowledge and tools for conflict resolution.

F. Organizational Skills

- Ability to develop plans and set goals
- Ability to manage time and determine priorities
- Ability to manage a budget
- Ability to report and evaluate in community settings

CHWs must have good organizational skills to help support the individuals and families they serve. They must be able to help and teach others to set and achieve goals. They help individuals and families set appointments, follow up with care plans and help address barriers, and complete reporting requirements.

G. Service Coordination

- Ability to identify and access resources
- Ability to make appropriate referrals when needed
- Ability to network, form partnerships, and work with others in planning efforts

CHWs help coordinate the care of their clients. They will be familiar with the agencies and professionals in the community they serve in order to assist clients and families to secure needed care. They understand the need for, and boundaries of, medical interpretation and ability to be a patient advocate. They are able to network, participate in community and agency planning and evaluation efforts directed at improving care, and bring needed services into the community.

H. Outreach Methods and Strategies

- Ability to engage others
- Ability to foster collaborative relationships
- Ability to build trust within the community

CHWs must be committed to outreach efforts that are directed at “meeting the people where they are.” Outreach means furnishing health-related information and services to a population that has not been

served or is underserved. CHWs use outreach strategies and methods in order to provide these services to populations or groups where they live, work, play, and congregate (such as churches, parks, grocery stores, community centers, etc.). They assist the community in finding, using, creating, and supporting resources among community members and systems of care.

I. Client and Community Assessment

- Ability to understand basic surveys, interviews, and observational methods
- Ability to understand living process of communities
- Ability to understand population health data

CHWs must continue to identify community and individual needs, concerns, and assets. They will use standard knowledge of basic health and social indexes to clearly define the needs of the community they are serving. CHWs will engage clients and their families in ongoing assessment of their needs and develop plans and strategies for clients, a targeted population, or community

Note: The Nebraska CHW Coalition Steering committee approved the following CHW Core Competencies on April 29, 2014.