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**Internships for Community Health Worker Certification**

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**Internships for Community Health Worker Certification**

**Overview**

Connecticut HB 7424, which became Public Law 19-117 in July 2019, creates a community health worker certification program to be administered by the Department of Public Health (DPH). The Public Law sets certification requirements and sets fees for initial certifications and renewals. In addition, it “establishes a 14-member Community Health Worker Advisory Body within the Office of Health Strategy (OHS).” Among other duties, the Advisory Body must advise OHS and DPH on education and certification requirements for community health worker training programs and provide DPH with a list of approved programs. The effective date is January 1, 2020.

As part of the certification process, CHWs will be required to complete an internship. In addition to being trained or educated as a community health worker by an organization approved by the Community Health Worker Advisory Body the bill establishes requirements for experience.

The law is silent on the specific requirements for internships, yet it does state that the CHW Advisory Body will advise OHS and DPH on matters related to education and certification requirements for community health worker training programs, including the minimum number of hours and internship requirements for certification.

The purpose of this document is to provide recommendations for how CHW internships will be structured for consideration by the Community Health Worker Advisory Body.

**Internship Recommendations: 2018 Report to the Legislature on Community Health Worker Certification**

The Report to the Legislature on Community Health Worker Certification does address the topic of internship. Recommendation 13 states that “Training programs should include 90 hours of training and an internship with a minimum of 50 hours.” The recommendation for a 50-hour internship resulted from research conducted with states that currently certify CHWs. The recommendation aligns with Rhode Island’s 50-hour requirement for an internship. Kentucky, Missouri and Ohio have more rigorous internship requirements with 80, 60 and 130 hours respectively.

**CHW Internship Task Group Formed to Develop Recommendations**

A task group was convened on August 21, 2019 by the Southwestern AHEC as part of its SIM CHW Initiative. Invited participants included representatives from Gateway Community College, Capital Community College, CHW Association of CT, Health Equity Solutions, Clifford Beers Clinic, Southwest Community Health Center, HPG, Project CARE/REACH grant/SCSU, and SIM CHW Initiative team. Participants are listed in Appendix A. The group began by discussing current approaches to internships and/or service learning then identified a list of issues and questions to be addressed in order to implement uniform internships associated with CHW certification. Topic areas included the following:

* Structure for Internships
* Role of Host Agencies
* Evaluation Process
* Communications
* Supports

A complete listing of the issues and questions is included as Appendix B. A follow-up meeting was held on September 4, 2019 to finalize the recommendations.

**Discussion Points**

The Task Group discussed the need to balance three major factors when considering the structure and length of the internship: 1) Making the length of the internship be manageable for the CHW, 2) Allowing for sufficient time to evaluate CHW skills and knowledge in a field setting and 3) Determining the level of effort required by internship site host agencies to oversee and manage internships.

Although 50 hours was included as a recommendation in the Report to the Legislature, some Task Group members felt that length of time was insufficient to make it worthwhile to an agency. Other members also stressed the importance of including a recommendation for the expected duration and approximate hours per week. Based on experience, several participating agencies noted that supervising interns requires a significant commitment from a host agency to ensure success and value for both parties.

The Task Group also emphasized the need for there to be consistency across internship sites to ensure parity. The group also pointed out the importance of having formal agreements in place between the CHW training provider and the internship host agency as well as the CHW intern and the host agency.

The Task Group also discussed the potential value of incentives and/or compensation for host agencies as well as CHW interns.

**Recommendations**

After categorizing the issues/questions, the Task Group then developed a set of recommendations, which were expanded and finalized at its second meeting on September 4, 2019. The recommendations are as follows:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Topic** | **Recommendation** |
| Length of Internship | Minimum of 50 hours over a period of six months, with option for extension based on circumstances. |
| Internship Host Agencies | Provider of CHW training is primarily responsible for recruiting and coordinating local internship sites; Potential sites include Health centers, FQHCs, hospitals, healthcare practices, public health departments, school-based health centers, libraries or community-based non-profit agencies; Students may also identify a site, including with current employers, to be approved by CHW training provider; If site is with current employer, additional tasks, a project or program must be agreed upon and included in contract/agreement. |
| Supervision | Required at internship site, CHW preferred as supervisor; Orientation for supervisors of internships to conducted by CHW training organization; Continuing Education credits may be awarded to CHW supervisors for a) orientation/training and b) supervision hours; Determine equivalency through research on other states. |
| Goal of internship | Demonstrate knowledge and perform entry-level CHW skills with professionalism and within ethical boundaries and scope of practice |
| Learning Objectives | Host agency, training organization and CHW intern will agree on individualized learning objectives that fit intern’s career interests and the mission and services of the agency; Provide a list of sample learning objectives as a resource. |
| Knowledge/Skills Assessment | Internship host agency and intern will select three to four skills/competencies to assess during internship; CHW interns will self-assess and supervisor will also assess. |
| Evaluation | Robust evaluative process of the internship program with a standardized format to be developed by OHS oversight/umbrella entity will be needed to fine-tune structure; Training provider organizations have primary responsibility for evaluation with reporting to OHS oversight entity; Feedback and data will be needed from CHW interns, CHW training organizations, CHW supervisors and host agency sites; Initial focus on process evaluation; Training provider organizations may add additional questions to standardized evaluation format. |
| Tools and materials | OHS oversight/umbrella entity to provide web-based access to online toolkit and materials for organizing managing CHW internships; Tools and materials to include description of internship process, sample contracts/agreements, skills/competencies selection and assessment forms. |

**Additional Considerations**

Southwestern AHEC reached out to its panel of national CHW experts for additional guidance regarding CHW internships based on a broader set of experiences with the subject. The information below reflects ideas for consideration by the Advisory Body in addition to the recommendations developed by the Task Group:

**Final standards:** The Advisory Body final standards should include a handbook with rules, guidelines, forms and templates to ensure sufficient uniformity across internships.

**Length of Internship:** The length of internships needs to be substantial if this is to be taken seriously as a valued, capstone experience in a professional education program, and not just a requirement or obstacle on the way to certification. The duration of the internship should be no more than six months, and preferably over a shorter period to ensure sufficient focus and intensity of the experience, i.e. 50 hours over a six month period translates to approximately two hours per week—an insufficient amount of time for a meaningful experience for the intern or the host agency.

**Internship assignments:** Intern assignments should add value to the services provided by the sponsoring organization, and not just help cover routine needs (like the stereotype of “the intern” fetching coffee). Signed agreement template should be developed incorporating learning objectives. Documentation: should include a report, presentation or portfolio including reflective assessment of learning experience.  This is an integral part of both learning and assessment. Regular meetings with both “academic” advisor and preceptor should be required, e.g. bi-weekly contact at least by phone. The student’s assignment should include critical thinking on how services of the sponsoring organization can be improved, from the point of view of a client/patient advocate. Their thinking should not be limited to what they individually are doing.

**Assessment rubrics**: It should be made clear that the cells in the table must include descriptive standards for each level of performance on each criterion, and not simply a subjective numeric score. Rubrics need to include requirements that demonstrate application of lived experience and not just classroom learning.

**Appendix A: Participant is CHW Internship Task Group**

**Erika Lynch**

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Certification Design Group member

**Christine Montgomery**

Clifford Beers

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Community Alliance for Research and Engagement (CARE), REACH Grant, SCSU

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Eve Berry

**Appendix B:**

**Issues and Questions Identified by CHW Internship Task Group**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Communications | What "package should be developed to describe the internship program? |
| Evaluation | How do we evaluate the overall internship effort? |
| Host Agencies | How can internships be done? Through community agencies? e.g. Immigration agency. |
| Host Agencies | Benefit to hosting agency |
| Host Agencies | Has to be a benefit to the agency |
| Host Agencies | How to integrate with care coordination; what are they going to be doing? Home? Phone? |
| Host Agencies | Service learning involved a lot to churn through |
| Host Agencies | Will there be qualifications for the preceptors? Do they have to have CHW experience? Knowledge? |
| Host Agencies | What can we give the agency as recognition? Incentive? |
| Host Agencies | CME's for sites? |
| Requirements/Risk | Are background checks needed? Then what? Privacy? |
| Requirements/Risk | Liability? |
| Structure | Breaks during academic year need to be covered |
| Structure | What is the ideal duration for internship? |
| Structure | What are the responsibilities: Site, preceptor, students? |
| Structure | What are the procedures for managing CHWs? |
| Structure | Look at interests of both employers and students/learners |
| Structure | How do we make it useful and not onerous? |
| Structure | To what extent are materials/approach "centralized" vs. individual training site governed? |
| Structure | CHW Association role with sites? |
| Structure | Should interns be paid? |
| Structure | Should sites be paid? |
| Structure | Could DPH look at AmeriCorps as a model? |
| Structure/Educational | How circle back to job expectations |
| Structure/Educational | Relevance of the internship to the future CHW |
| Structure/Educational | Medical students requirement--goals and objectives for internship |
| Structure/Educational | How to get a good match between the CHW and the agency? Example of 3 skills? |
| Structure/Educational | Should agency be involved in helping to select the competencies being evaluated? |
| Structure/Eligible Activities | Is online work part of the internship? |
| Structure/Eligible Activities | What are eligible activities for internship? |
| Structure/Evaluation | How to achieve parity of experience across all sites? |
| Structure/Evaluation | What is the valued added of having a CHW internship? |
| Supports | Sites may need training in how to use, understand CHWs |
| Supports | What resources can be made available for students online? |
| Supports | Can AmeriCorps materials be useful? |
| Supports | Could there be a central website or other resource to provide resources? |

**Appendix C: Overview Description of** **CHW Internships**

Students who have completed CHW Core Competencies training from an approved provider are required to complete internships with a local employer partner such as a health center, hospital, public health department or community-based non-profit agency.  Each site will have a formal agreement with the training provider that outlines responsibilities for the agency including supervision of interns and the assessment process. Students negotiate individualized learning objectives that fit their own career interests and the mission and services of the agency.  CHW interns will be encouraged to focus on practicing and enhancing 3-4 key CHW skills on their internship, such as:

* Providing community-based health outreach services
* Co-facilitating a support or educational group along with an agency colleague
* Developing new health education materials or presentations
* Co-facilitating a training or workshop on a designated health topic
* Providing initial client-interviews or intakes
* Supporting clients with chronic disease management, such as the development and implementation of an Action Plan for Self-Management
* Providing client-centered case management services
* Participating in the development and/or implementation of a survey or community diagnosis designed to gather information from the communities served by the agency
* Participating in a community-organizing or public policy initiative or project

**Evaluating the Internship**

At each site, the Internship Supervisor is asked to evaluate the CHW’s performance in meeting the terms of the learning objectives halfway through the internship placement (at “midterm”) and at the end of the internship.  These evaluations are confidential and submitted directly to training provider organization. Students evaluate their own performance at the end of the internship, as well as evaluating the internship placement site.

**Appendix D:**

**Sample Internship Assessment Tools**



