



The Community Health Worker and Oral Health

What is a Community Health Worker?

Community health workers (CHWs) are frontline public health workers who have a close understanding of the communities they serve. The CHWs are vital for language, cultural, and trust barriers that might exist with clients who are navigating the health care system. CHW's can also assist with access to care for dental needs that their clients may require.

Here are some other common names for Community Health Workers?

- Patient navigators
- Outreach workers
- Health coaches
- Health educators
- Breastfeeding peer counselors
- Community-based doulas
- Peer support specialist

What do Community Health Workers do?

- CHWs build relationships with patients that allow them to address their needs in a holistic way. For example, while a doctor might prescribe an inhaler to a patient with asthma, a CHW could make sure the patient can afford to fill the prescription and get to the pharmacy during business hours and examine the patient's home for asthma triggers.
- A clinician might help a patient learn to treat his diabetes, but a CHW may be the one to learn that the patient is homeless and needs to know how to manage their diabetes without having a place to cook.
- Discuss health concerns with members of the community.
- Provide informational counseling and social support.
- Help people understand their health conditions.
- Translate or interpret health information for clients.
- Organize outreach programs.
- Provide referrals and educational materials.
- Advocate for individual and community health needs.
- Collect data and report findings to health care providers.

Why do Community Health Workers matter?

- Research shows CHWs can improve health outcomes and save money for the health care system by ensuring people get the right care. They are especially effective in reaching people who are not well served by the health care system.

How can a Community Health Worker help with my oral health needs?

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- Dental care is the most common unmet health care need. CHWs can provide oral health education and the ability to assess the need for an oral health examination by a dentist.
 - 1 out of 3 adults (20-44 years of age) have untreated tooth decay.
 - 1 out of 5 adults 60 years of age and older no longer have natural teeth.
- Common concepts include
 - Cavities are the most common chronic childhood disease.
 - Cavities are preventable.
 - Encourage clients to brush teeth twice a day.
 - Encourage clients to clean between teeth with floss.
 - Encourage clients to drink fluoridated water.
 - Protect children's teeth with sealants.
 - Limit the amount and how often you drink juice, which is not a replacement for whole fruit.
 - Encourage clients to skip soda, sports drinks, and limit snacking on "junk food."

Community Health Workers help to navigate

- Provider selection(s)
- Understanding health benefits
- Overcome transportation barriers
- Overcome cultural barriers
- Work around financial barriers
- Remove language barriers

Community Health Workers Workforce Development

CHW workforce development interventions addressing certification and training are supported by promising evidence. Regardless of where CHWs work or what type of populations they are serving, one thing remains constant: They devote their careers to helping educate and improve the health of their neighbors. If that's a cause you can get behind, this might be the health care career you've been seeking.

Resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<https://www.cdc.gov/publichealthgateway/chw/index.html>

Explorehealthcareers.org

<https://explorehealthcareers.org/career/allied-health-professions/community-health-worker/#:~:text=Community%20health%20workers%20are%20dedicated,health%20care%20information%20and%20services>

Community Health Workers: Resources and Fact Sheets

<https://www.cthealth.org/publication/community-health-workers-resources-fact-sheets/>