

Community Health Workers in Nebraska

What is the role of the Community Health Worker?

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; and
- 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 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.

Source: Adopted by consensus by the Public Health Association of Nebraska Community Health Worker section April 2015: (<http://publichealthne.org/phan-sections/community-health-worker-section/>).

What are the skills of Community Health Workers?

Here are widely-recognized competencies of Community Health Workers:

Community Health Worker Competencies	
Communication Skills	Advocacy Skills
Interpersonal Skills	Organization Skills
Capacity Building	Service Coordination
Teaching Skills	Outreach Methods and Strategies
Client Assessment	Community Assessment

Source: Public Health Association of Nebraska Community Health Worker section (2015); also adopted by Douglas County (NE) Community Health Worker Section (2017).

Approaches to training CHWs vary in Nebraska. At present there is no assurance these competencies are included in all projects and curricula involving CHWs.

How many Community Health Workers are working in Nebraska?

Nebraska lacks a mechanism for accurately counting this workforce. Two recent independent surveys attempted to capture the number of organizations or programs employing Community Health Workers in the state, and the attitudes of employers about Community Health Workers.

- CHW Project inventory: <https://neactioncoalition.org/community-health-worker-role-chw/>
- Report of the Employer Survey: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1186&context=commstudiespapers>

Are Community Health Workers certified, regulated, or licensed by the State of Nebraska?

No. At the present time, neither Community Health Workers (CHWs) nor the programs that train CHWs are certified, regulated, or licensed by the State of Nebraska. Community Health Workers should not perform or be assigned services or duties that require a license from a professional licensing board.

Are there qualifications or training requirements in order to use the title Community Health Worker?

No. At the present time, there is no consensus on the foundational training for a Community Health Worker beyond their relationships in the community. As a result, there is wide variation in duration and nature of training for CHWs in Nebraska. This can make it difficult for CHWs to move between employers.

Why is it important for health professionals to engage with this emerging workforce?

Community Health Workers represent innovative potential to better address the health needs and social determinants of health that may perpetuate disparities in the population. Integrating CHWs on interdisciplinary health teams may result in greater cultural capacity and system-wide effectiveness in achieving population health outcomes. CHWs complement traditional health care delivery by addressing patients' basic needs while allowing other providers to operate at the top of their licenses. They can also serve as an essential bridge between the community and health care teams.

Healthcare leaders can help the CHW workforce develop through shared experience with competency-based training and curricula, supervision, career ladders, and advocacy. Interdisciplinary practice and a changing workforce are only one facet of health systems transformation. Healthcare leaders who wish to remain relevant, visible, and impactful in the future need to pay attention and be part of charting the course to improved population health, well-being, and equity.

Where can I find out more about Community Health Workers in Nebraska?

- Community Health Worker Association of Nebraska Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/communityhealthworkersofNE/>
- Douglas County Community Health Workers Workgroup: <https://sites.google.com/a/douglascounty-ne.gov/douglas-county-community-health-worker-workgroup/>
- Nebraska DHHS Office of Women's and Men's Health: <http://dhhs.ne.gov/publichealth/HealthNavigation/Pages/CHWTraining.aspx>
- Nebraska Action Coalition – Future of Nursing <https://neactioncoalition.org/community-health-worker-role-chw/>
- Public Health Association of Nebraska, Community Health Worker Section <http://publichealthne.org/phant-sections/community-health-worker-section/>
- Behavioral Health Education Center of Nebraska <https://www.unmc.edu/bhecn/about/stories/grant-paraprofessionals-2017.html>