

Addressing Chronic Disease Through Community Health Workers: A Policy and Systems-Level Approach

The following is a synopsis of *Addressing Chronic Disease Through Community Health Workers: A Policy and Systems-Level Approach*, a policy brief published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in March 2011.



What is already known on this topic?

Community health workers (CHWs) are widely recognized as important members of the health care workforce. CHWs make vital contributions to the achievement of U.S. health care goals by helping community members access care, overcome barriers to appropriate care, and improve self-management of chronic diseases. Comprehensive state policy changes—including workforce development and training, occupational regulation, guidelines for research and evaluation, and sustainable financing—are needed to promote and sustain CHW services.

What is added by this document?

This document provides guidance for implementing programs that integrate CHWs into community-based efforts to prevent chronic diseases, including heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and cancer. The brief discusses CHWs' impact on disease prevention

and management and describes CDC-funded programs that engage CHWs. Examples of state legislative action, recommendations for policies to build a sustainable CHW workforce, and numerous additional resources are included.

What are the implications for public health practice?

The 2010 Institute of Medicine report *A Population-Based Approach to Prevent and Control Hypertension* recommends that the CDC Division for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention work with state partners to bring about policy and systems changes that result in trained CHWs "...deployed in high-risk communities to help support healthy living strategies that include a focus on hypertension." This brief provides basic information and resources that will enable states to implement this important recommendation.

What are the applications of this document?

To foster an environment supportive of integrating CHWs at a systems level, consider the following approaches:

- ▶ Assess existing policies and systems: Does the state have uniform training for the CHW workforce? Is CHW service reimbursable?
 - ▶ Provide leadership for forming partnerships with broad representation, including CHW state associations, to guide review of and response to assessment findings and advocate for reimbursement, uniform training, and other appropriate actions.
 - ▶ Collaborate with partners to implement comprehensive CHW policies in workforce development, occupational regulation, financing for sustainable employment, and standards for publicly funded research and program evaluation.
- ▶ Work with partners to implement legislative requirements.
 - ▶ Support evaluation of CHW-related policy and systems changes.
 - ▶ Educate state and local advocates on the benefits of integrating CHWs into the health care system and the importance of policies that support this integration.
 - ▶ Educate public and private health care providers on the potential roles for CHWs, how CHWs fit into the Medical Home/Primary Care model, and how to engage community-based organizations that employ CHWs.
 - ▶ Partner with nonprofit agencies (e.g., local health education centers, community-based organizations that employ CHWs, and academic institutions such as state and community colleges) to develop training and certification standards. These partners can collaborate to develop strategies for training CHWs and their supervisors and can develop an evaluation plan.

Resources

Health Resources and Services Administration
Community Health Workers National Workforce Study
<http://bhpr.hrsa.gov/healthworkforce/chw/default.htm>

Health Resources and Services Administration
CHW Registered Apprenticeship Program
301-443-6950

Health Resources and Services Administration
Area Health Education Centers Directory
<http://bhpr.hrsa.gov/grants/area.htm>

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The findings and conclusions in these reports are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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