



COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS (CHWs)

The following occupational overview is based on information provided by Western MA healthcare employers, Massachusetts Association of Community Health Workers (MACHW), Central Mass Area Health Education Center, the MA Department of Public Health (DPH), and regional education and training partners. The Healthcare Workforce Partnership discussed at a regional Allied Health meeting on August 29, 2012.

Occupational Overview

Community Health Workers (CHWs) provide an invaluable bridge between patients, healthcare and human service settings. CHWs promote full and equal access to health and social services in the community he or she serves, and aid in the implementing of programs to promote, maintain, and improve individual and community health. They are hired primarily by healthcare and community-based organizations because of their understanding of and connection with their communities.

There are over 50 different job titles for CHWs in the state of Massachusetts. Some titles include:

- Promotor(a) de salud
- Outreach Educator
- Outreach Advocate
- Youth Worker
- Home Visitor
- Patient Navigator
- Community Coordinator
- Family Service Coordinator
- Community Health Representative
- Home Visitor
- Street Outreach Worker
- Parent Aide

Due to the various job titles, it is unclear how many CHWs work in Western MA and the entry/median salary ranges. According to The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH), the state's median salary was \$26,000 in 2005. According to the US Department of Labor, entry level CHWs in western MA may earn a starting salary of \$29,080 and a more experienced CHW may earn \$45,780 (source: www.vcn.org). The US Bureau of Labor Statistics recently created a Standard Occupation Code (SOC) for CHWs (21-1094.00). This new code will make it easier to understand the supply of CHWs in the future.

Community Health Workers in Action

Local employers include primary care facilities, community health centers, human service nonprofits organizations, faith-based organizations. Some specific local employers include:

- *Holyoke Health Center (HHC)*: HHC currently employs nine (9) CHWs in five different programs.
- *Brightwood Health Center (BHC)*: BHC currently employs two (2) CHWs and partners with Health New England to provide training for new CHWs.
- *Caring Health Center (CHC)*: CHC currently employs one (1) Patient Navigator
- *Commonwealth Care Alliance*: Anticipates hiring CHWs in the future
- *Other employers?*

CHWs employ four main strategies in their work: client advocacy, health education, outreach, and health system navigation. Specific CHW tasks as stated by local employers and the BLS include:

- Advocacy
 - Providing interpretation for patients who speak a language other than English.
 - Identifying personal and system barriers and connect patients to the resources they need.
 - Providing support in patient centered medical homes by developing relationships and supporting the transition to care from hospital, to home, to visiting nurses, to Primary Care Provider/Clinical Care Manager.
- Health Education
 - Assisting patients in the controlling of chronic diseases through medication education.
 - Preventing the progression of Type 2 Diabetes by providing critical bilingual education and promoting culturally appropriate lifestyle changes from the time of diagnosis.
 - Managing referrals to diabetes programs, providing diabetes education through classes and supermarket tours, and modeling healthy behaviors.
 - Providing patients with simple and effective self-management skills to promote weight loss and prevent or control chronic diseases.
- Outreach
 - Tracking women who require follow-up for abnormal mammogram results and provide outreach education on the risk factors associated with breast cancer.
 - Conducting home visits as part of care coordination.
- Health System Navigation
 - Providing information and referrals to health and human services for patients in community-based settings.
 - Guiding patients through the healthcare system to ensure timely and culturally competent care. (i.e. enrolling patients in health insurance programs)

Statewide Certification

There is currently no statewide certification for CHWs in the state of Massachusetts. The state established a board of certification of community health workers effective January 2012. The board is composed of 11 members and chaired by the Commissioner of the Department of Public Health. The Board of Certification for CHWs is responsible for:

- Articulating the unique abilities of CHWs
- Establishing the expectations for supervisors in documenting CHWs abilities
- Identifying training and continuing education needed
- Establishing an assessment to determine eligibility to certification
- Developing the regulations and process for “grandfathering” current CHWs

Certification of CHWs will be voluntary. CHWs will be able to practice without certification but will be required to obtain certification to be considered a “certified CHW”.

Education and Training Programs

Currently no standard education and training requirements exist for CHWs in Massachusetts. According to a 2005 survey, 60% of CHWs have degrees beyond high school, 19% have attended some college level courses beyond high school, 12.5% hold a high school degree or its equivalent, and 4% do not hold a high school degree or its equivalent. (2005 MDPH survey of CHW workforce in MA).

Existing training and education opportunities are offered by regional Area Health Education Centers (AHECs) and community colleges. The majority are noncredit programs that are not directly linked to other occupational training programs. Current Massachusetts training and education opportunities include:

- Central Mass Area Health Education Center (AHEC) currently provides an Outreach Worker Training program. This training is occasionally offered in Western Massachusetts.
http://www.cmahec.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=46&Itemid=149
- Community Health Education Center (CHEC) Boston currently provides an Outreach Educators (OE's)/Community Health Workers (CHWs) program.
<http://www.bphc.org/programs/chech/Pages/Home.aspx>
- Community Health Education Center (CHEC) Northeast currently provides a Comprehensive Outreach Education Certificate program. <http://www.lchealth.org/CHEC.shtml>
- Mass Bay Community College currently offers a Community Health Certificate program.
http://www.massbay.edu/uploadedFiles/Second_Level_Pages/Academics/Liberal_Arts_-_Community_Health_Certificate_.pdf
- Bunker Hill Community College currently offers a Community Health Worker Certificate program.
<http://www.bhcc.mass.edu/PDFs/2012-13catalog/2012-13-grid-79.pdf>

Future training and education opportunities include:

- Springfield Technical Community College will be providing a Community Health Worker Certificate of Achievement in January 2013. For more information please contact Ana Sanchez, College & Career Navigator, STCC Transformation Project 413-755-4789 or 413-858-2848, aisanchez@stcc.edu
- Holyoke Community College is in the very early stages of exploring a potential Community Health Worker career track through their existing associate's degree in Foundations of Health program.
<http://www.hcc.edu/courses-and-programs/college-catalog/areas-of-study/foundations-of-health>

Going Forward

CHWs are a critical component of our community's health system. The Healthcare Workforce Partnership will continue researching where CHWs are employed as well as current levels of education and future training requirements. With the implementation of state and federal healthcare reform, there is considerable discussion about increasing the use of CHWs and their focus on prevention, system navigation and patient outreach. Historically, employer's use of CHWs was tied to grant funding. With healthcare reform, there may be more reliable state and federal funding available to support CHWs. DPH suggests that CHW salary ranges should be reviewed and that sustainable financing for CHW positions be established. Furthermore, a 2006 report created by the National Fund for Medical education also emphasizes the need to "explore and develop viable financing arrangements that go beyond short term grants". DPH also suggests that an appropriate career ladder should be created to promote continued education and career advancement.

The Springfield Department of Health and Human Services and Community Outreach Workers Network and Training (COWNT) have agreed to conduct a survey of current CHWs working in Western MA and their employers to better understand the workforce and future demand. The Healthcare Workforce Partnership will reconvene in 2013 to discuss CHWs after partners have completed additional research and program development.

Additional Resources

Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) – Office of Community Health Workers - <http://www.mass.gov/dph/communityhealthworkers>

Massachusetts Associate of Community Health Workers (MACHW) - <http://www.machw.org/>

Community Health Workers in Massachusetts – Improving Health Care and Public Health
<http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/docs/dph/com-health/com-health-workers/legislature-report.pdf>

Community Health Workers Essential to Improving Health in Massachusetts
<http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/docs/dph/com-health/com-health-workers/comm-health-workers-narrative.pdf>

Advancing Community Health Worker Practice and Utilization: The Focus on Financing
<http://futurehealth.ucsf.edu/Content/29/2006-12-Advancing-Community-Health-Worker-Practice-and-Utilization-The-Focus-on-Financing.pdf>

Healthcare Workforce Partnership of Western Mass - <http://westernmasshealthcareers.org/local-careers/office-research/community-health-workers>