

Community Health Workers – Kansas

Informational handout for the Kansas MCH Council meeting October 13, 2021

Overview

Community Health Workers (CHWs) are a diverse part of the public and private health workforce. They serve in all geographic areas of Kansas. They serve in both state and local programs. They have diverse backgrounds and experiences. In Kansas, CHWs serve in both paid staff and volunteer staff roles in a variety of service organizations in community and health settings throughout the state.

In 2020, the United Methodist Health Ministry Fund (UMHMF) partnered with Wichita State University to conduct research on the Kansas Community Health Worker Workforce. A [research brief](#) is available, in addition to the [full report](#).

What is a CHW?

The Kansas Community Health Worker Coalition (KCHWC) has defined the role, competencies, and scope of practice for a CHW. The following is a direct quote from the [Coalition's website](#).

A [community health worker](#) is a frontline public health worker who is a trusted member of and/or has an unusually close understanding of the community served. This trusting relationship enables the worker to serve as a liaison/link/intermediary between health/social services and the community to facilitate access to services and improve the quality and cultural competence of service delivery.

A community health worker 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.

Source: "[Community Health Workers](#)." Member Section. 2017. Accessed July 10, 2017.

According to the UMHMF report, CHWs are known as many alternative names (e.g., health navigator, promotor(a), advocate, and educator), however their role as a bridge between community members and the medical and social services they need is the foundation to this part of our health workforce.

CHWs are most known for their role in providing assistance and guidance to community members, culturally or linguistically appropriate education services, advocacy, care coordination, and insurance enrollment assistance. However, the UMHMF research outlined the following strengths and benefits of utilizing CHWs:

- *Return on investment:* Integrating CHWs into the health care delivery system is associated with more cost-effective and sustainable care.
- *Health outcomes:* Individually-designed care made possible through CHWs leads to improved chronic disease control, mental health, quality of care, and reduced hospitalizations.
- *Healthcare accessibility:* CHWs increase access to services for individuals who often avoid preventive and routine care or only access health care for emergencies.



Core Competencies and Scope of Practice (from KCHWC)

CHW Core Competencies

Community Health Workers are liaisons aware of resources in the communities they serve. They play a vital role in improving Kansas's health by providing a connection between health systems and community resources, as well as education on how to reduce behavioral health risk factors. Current training focuses on these core principles:

1. Professionalism and Conduct
2. Self-awareness
3. Service Coordination and System Navigation
4. Education to Promote Healthy Behavior Change
5. Advocacy
6. Individual and Community Capacity Building
7. Effective Communications Strategies
8. Cultural Responsiveness
9. Documentation and Reporting
10. Use of Public Health/Community Health Concepts and Approaches
11. Individual Assessment
12. Community Assessment

CHW Scope of Practice

Kansas Community Health Workers (CHW) utilize core competencies that aid in connecting individuals to the information and services needed for optimal, individualized health outcomes. Core competencies support the CHW in performing appropriately within different models of practice as determined by employers. The following Scope of Practice encompasses the roles and responsibilities CHWs may have based upon existing practice models being utilized by multi-disciplinary employers:

- **Client Support:** Provide encouragement and social support to assist clients with goal setting and barrier identification within professional boundaries.
- **Care Coordination:** Assist in coordinating care by linking people to appropriate information and services.
- **Healthcare Liaison:** Serve as a culturally-informed liaison between clients, community and healthcare systems.
- **Health Education:** Provide culturally appropriate health education to individuals, organizations and/or communities, in an effort to reduce modifiable risk factors and encourage healthy behaviors.
- **Advocacy:** Recognize gaps and advocate for individual and community health needs.

Kansas CHW Initiatives (as of October 2021)

