

The Community Health Worker Role on the HIV Care Continuum

A Community Health Worker (CHW) is a member of the health care workforce who reduces the burden and stress of large caseloads and enhances traditional Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program care teams. This fact sheet is an introduction to CHWs. It defines CHW, lists other titles by which CHWs are referred, describes how CHWs enhance HIV care teams, and identifies the roles CHWs perform.

CHW Defined

As defined by the American Public Health Association, a “CHW 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 CHW 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 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.”¹

CHWs Are Also Known As . . .

CHWs are known by a variety of titles. Some of the most common are:

- Peer Educators
- Outreach Workers
- Patient/Peer Navigators
- Peer Counselors
- Health System Navigators
- Linkage to Care Coordinators

How CHWs Enhance HIV Care Teams

CHWs enhance HIV care teams by working in partnership with case managers, nurses, doctors, social workers, and other service providers to address the medical, social, and economic needs of people living with HIV (PLWH). CHWs are often referred to as a bridge between the client, the community where the client lives and medical clinics or community-based organizations. As such their work is bi-directional. CHWs have a role in improving the health of clients and their communities and they also influence the program and the clinical setting in which they function. CHWs unique ability to connect with the community can have an impact on all aspects of the *Triple Aim*: “improving client experience, improving health care, and lowering cost.”²

Within HIV care, CHWs are a bridge between HIV clinics and support service agencies and health care organizations.



CHW Roles

The *Community Health Worker Core Consensus Project* (C3) developed 10 core CHW roles. Although these roles are not HIV-specific, they can be used to develop tasks and responsibilities for CHWs on your HIV care team.

The following table lists the CHW roles developed by C3 and provides an example of how each role is performed in one or more stages of the HIV Care Continuum.

CHW Role ³	How the Role is Performed Across the HIV Care Continuum
1. Cultural Mediation Between Individuals, Communities and Health and Social Systems	Support and increase linkage to and retention in care and adherence to treatment by educating clients about treatment and the appropriate use of services
2. Providing Culturally Appropriate Health Education and Information	Improve adherence to treatment by providing structured educational sessions on topics such as HIV, viral life cycle, treatment, and side effects
3. Care Coordination, Case Management, and System Navigation	Support retention in care by assisting clients with referrals for transportation, housing, behavioral health treatment, and other support services
4. Providing Coaching and Social Support	Support retention in care and treatment adherence by providing emotional support to clients
5. Advocating for Individuals and Communities	Support the entire HIV Care Continuum by serving on Ryan White Planning Councils
6. Building Individual and Community Capacity	Support retention in care and reduce barriers by collaborating with medical, behavioral health, and social services providers
7. Providing Direct Service	Support treatment adherence by picking up prescriptions for clients and educating them on the medication and its side effects
8. Implementing Individual and Community Assessments	Support linkage to and retention in care by working with case managers to assess clients' needs and develop care plans
9. Conducting Outreach	Support linkage to and retention in care by re-engaging clients lost to follow-up
10. Participating in Evaluation and Research	Document activities in electronic health records

References

¹American Public Health Association. n.d. Community Health Workers. Available at: <https://www.apha.org/apha-communities/member-sections/community-health-workers>

²Berwick DM, Nolan TW, and Whittington, J. (2008) The Triple Aim: Care, Health Cost. *Health Affairs*. 27(3):759-769

³Amended from Rosenthal EL, Rush CH, and Allen CG. (2016) Understanding Scope and Competencies. A Contemporary Look at the United States Community Health Workers Field. Progress Report of the Community Health Worker (CHW) Core Consensus Project. Building National Consensus on CHW Core Roles, Skills, and Qualities. Available at: <http://www.chwcentral.org/understanding-scope-and-competencies-contemporary-look-united-states-community-health-worker-field>

