

# *Community Health Worker - Resource Map*

This handbook provides an introduction to Community Health Workers (CHWs), including definitions, opportunities for training and employment, and ways to support this growing field. It should serve as a resource for community members interested in this field as well as institutions and organizations desiring to integrate CHWs into their workforce. It was created by a team of Community Health Workers and staff from community based organizations in an effort to advance community health work in Oregon. Oregon Health Equity Alliance partnered with Oregon Community Health Workers Association of Oregon (ORCHWA), the statewide professional association for CHWs in Oregon, to compile this brief.

## *Definition*

CHWs are trusted community members who participate in capacitation (empowering training) so that they can promote health in their own communities. Communities can be defined by race/ethnicity, geography, age, sexual orientation, disability status, other factors, or a combination of factors.

### Quotes

"[We] save money by speaking prevention."

"Doctors can give you medicine ... to heal your body ... but we're ... talking with [people] and are one-on-one with them ... we get in their minds and are helping them. That's where your real healing comes from."

"[We] are in the same area and the same level as the people we are helping. We are not coming ... from these high offices ... telling them what do you need, or what can I help you with ... We know what they need because we've been there."

These are all from the 1998 Natl. Community Health Advisor Study but I think they are all equally applicable today.

## *Ready and Available Workforce*

Approximately 1200 people have completed a CHW certification training. Many of those are not fully employed as CHWs.

Certified CHWs can be found on the Traditional Health Workers Registry, at:

<https://traditionalhealthworkerregistry.oregon.gov/Search>

## *Recommendations to Support Excellent CHW Practice*

Integrating CHWs into health promotion and service provision requires the following good practice:

- State policy should support CHWs in both clinical and community-based settings.
- State policy should ensure that CHW programs promote job development in communities most affected by health inequities.
- CHWs should be guaranteed a minimum of 51% representation on any group that governs CHW policy and practice.
- CHWs receive the best level of support and supervision from other CHWs or other health professionals with CHW supervision training. ORCHWA offers a CHW supervisor training.
- Additional recommendations can be found in ORCHWA's 2019 Statewide Needs Assessment available at [www.orchwa.org](http://www.orchwa.org).

Call out box?

Demonstrated outcomes of CHW programs include improvements in: access to preventive care, compliance with prescribed care, chronic disease management, health system cultural competence, patient-provider communication, and patient and community empowerment. Finally, a growing number of studies document CHW contributions to improving health care utilization and reducing costs.

*Some examples of where CHWs are currently employed and supported*



CHWs have well defined scope of work that has been refined through research and practice over the course of many years. Below is the scope of practice for CHWs approved by Oregon's Traditional Health Worker Commission.



*In addition to enhancing health promotion and health service provision, CHWs can also contribute greatly to additional systems that play a role in addressing the social determinants of health.*

*What we mean by social determinants of health:* The social determinants of health are the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age. These circumstances are shaped by the distribution of money, power and resources at global, national and local levels. The social determinants of health are mostly responsible for health inequities - the unfair and avoidable differences in health status seen within and between countries and communities.

### *OPPORTUNITIES TO EXPAND THE ROLE OF CHWs*

As trusted community members, CHWs can contribute to improving health and eliminating health inequities in a variety of settings. CHWs have historically been employed by organizations focused directly on health promotion. Recently, appreciating their contribution, additional sectors, for example schools, have begun to integrate and employ CHWs. Many other sectors could greatly benefit from the wisdom and skills of CHWs.

