

Community Health Worker Integration in Local County Health Departments in Urban and Rural Settings

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Background & Purpose

Local health departments (LHDs) are being called upon to integrate Community Health Workers (CHW) into their programming. However, few studies have examined the facilitators and barriers to CHW integration in LHDs. Given the importance of organizational support for CHW core competencies, LHD's potential for enhancing county services, and their unique role in the community, this participatory study examines the facilitators and barriers to CHW integration at urban and rural LHDs in Arizona.

Methods

Arizona Prevention Research Center (AzPRC) team members conducted in-depth discussions with supervisors and CHWs from the Pima County Health Department and the Yuma County Public Health Services District to explore strategies for integrating CHWs into LHD infrastructure. The discussions were framed around the National Committee for Quality Assurance's (NCQA) and Penn Center for Community Health Workers' (PCCHW) ***Nine Concepts Needed to Support CHWs**, a list of organizational elements needed to support the development and sustainment of the CHW workforce. The AzPRC convened the group a total of 7 times and carefully reviewed each of the nine concepts, their elements, and any additional considerations needed for adapting these concepts within the LHD context.

1

CHW Recruitment & Qualifications

Includes:

- CHW Qualities & Qualifications
- Recruitment Process
- Hiring Process

LHD considerations:

- Government HR practices differ
- Standards of salary for CHWs
- Qualification requirements may be a barrier for many
- Job descriptions - can be too specific or too broad

2

Training for CHWs

Includes:

- Initial/Pre-service Training (& Certification)
- Continuous CHW Training
- General Training Methods, Content, & Evaluation

LHD considerations:

- CHW Voluntary Certification
- Paying for training
- Approved Core Competency Training Programs (AZ specific)
- Evaluation of CHWs

3

Supervision of CHWs

Includes:

- Supervisor Qualities & Qualifications
- Supervisor Role
- Structure & Process of Supervision
- Training, Support, & Evaluation of Supervisor

LHD considerations:

- Flexibility and autonomy for CHWs
- Mindful of working hours
- Advocate for CHW self-care
- Training for CHW supervision

4

Support for CHWs

Includes:

- Job Aids, Resources, & Supplies
- Documentation Tools
- Safety & Emergency Protocols & Resources
- Peer Support
- CHW Well-Being

LHD considerations:

- Language barriers
- Best practices for data collection
- Documentation of CHW history
- Self-care and burnout prevention

5

CHW Scope of Work

Includes:

- CHW Roles & Responsibilities
- Flexible, Person-Centered Work Practices & Manageable Caseload

LHD considerations:

- Equity in workload and program management
- Capacity-building opportunities
- Cross-training in multiple programs, abilities, and topics
- Frequent 1:1s and check-ins
- CHW retention

6

CHW Workforce Development

Includes:

- Performance Assessment
- Career Ladder
- Pay & Incentives, Awards & Recognition

LHD considerations:

- Follow-up on individual needs and professional development plans
- Reflection and improvement
- Career advancement opportunities
- Increase awareness and knowledge of CHW roles and competencies

7

Health/Social Care Teams

Includes:

- Define & Recognize CHW Role with Team Members
- Organizational Commitment & Process to Link Health & Social Care

LHD considerations:

- Time is limited in county clinics
- Program & medical terminology may cause confusion
- Prevention services not prioritized
- Expansion of the referral process between clinics and LHDs

8

Organizational Data Systems & Engagement

Includes:

- Data Systems for Quality Improvement
- CHW Engagement
- Community-Centered Care & Engagement

LHD considerations:

- HIPAA-compliant communication between providers and CHWs
- Involve CHWs in planning processes
- Leadership opportunities for CHWs

9

Program Sustainability

Includes:

- Program Evaluation & Improvement
- Financial Sustainability

LHD considerations:

- Continuous assessment of CHW's scope of work
- Stakeholders must work with CHWs to identify challenges and opportunities for the workforce
- Reimbursement & financial models
- Evaluate if the duties of CHW positions align with pay structure



Discussion

- Government policies and procedures differ between LHDs and create barriers and restrictions for integrating CHWs within LHDs
- Need more inclusive hiring practices for CHWs at LHDs
- CHWs are being placed in inappropriate roles within LHDs
- Standardization of CHW's scope of work and salary is needed at LHDs
- LHDs need to prioritize the development of sustainability plans for the CHW workforce and CHW retention strategies

What's next?

- Conduct key informant interviews with leadership, supervisors, and CHWs to inform case studies on the integration of CHWs within LHDs in Pima and Yuma Counties.



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