

## Yuma CONÉCTATE: Addressing Social Determinants of Health in Arizona



CONÉCTATE Community Health Workers at a community event.

Yuma CONÉCTATE (“connect” in Spanish), is a local initiative of the Yuma County Public Health Services District (YCPHSD) that helps community members who were negatively impacted by COVID-19 access essential services like housing, health care, and employment support. YCPHSD developed CONÉCTATE by adapting a program from the [University of Arizona Prevention Research Center](#) (AzPRC). CONÉCTATE addresses critical social determinants of health and shows how local health departments can work with researchers to improve community health and meet community needs.

### BARRIERS TO ACCESSING HEALTH SERVICES

County health departments in Arizona provide various services aimed at tackling social determinants of health, but these efforts are often disconnected, even within individual counties and health departments. This makes it hard for people to find and use essential services such as housing, job assistance, education, health care, and mental health support. It’s especially tough for people at risk for chronic diseases, who may already have physical and emotional problems. Complex health problems, isolation, and lack of tailored support intensify these challenges. In addition, people with unpredictable and demanding job schedules, like farmworkers, face extra hurdles due to the limited clinic hours and long waiting times for medical resources.<sup>1</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic worsened these issues, showing the clear need for easy-to-access health services and support.



Yuma County Public Health Services District showing the CONÉCTATE CHWs at work.

### COLLABORATION AND ADAPTATION: BUILDING LOCAL CAPACITY

The AzPRC research projects, [LINKS](#) and [UNIDOS](#) (2014–2024), are programs led by community health workers (CHWs) that connect people of Mexican origin living in the US-Mexico border region with essential services. YCPHSD was a research partner with AzPRC on these projects. In 2021, YCPHSD adapted the LINKS/UNIDOS program as CONÉCTATE with the help of the AzPRC Participatory Evaluation Institute (PEI). YCPHSD worked with the PEI to build internal



capacity to adapt and sustain CONÉCTATE. The program expanded to include three CHWs who provided case management and referrals to social and clinical services. The PEI helped YCPHSD set program goals, manage the referral system, and evaluate the program's impact.

Through evaluation, the UNIDOS/LINKS-led intervention increased access to essential services, improved social support, boosted hopefulness, and enhanced the quality of life for participants. To continue these benefits, YCPHSD secured CDC funding and expanded the program. CONÉCTATE now includes quality improvement processes to ensure it remains flexible and meets community needs.

## VALUABLE TAKEAWAYS FROM THE YUMA INITIATIVE

- 1. Collaboration:** Working closely with CHWs and researchers ensured the program's relevance and effectiveness.
- 2. Adaptability:** Trusting relationships and open communication between the program staff and the evaluation team resulted in a community-clinical linkages program that was more practical and feasible for a local health department.
- 3. Involvement:** Allowing CHW leadership in the health department and in creating a countywide CHW coalition made the program more effective.



Yuma County Community Health Workers at a community event.

## STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY HEALTH THROUGH CHWS

CHWs in the program received extensive training, including courses addressing COVID-19, [CLAS standards](#), health conditions, and social services. They played a crucial role in community response efforts, like organizing vaccination events and distributing at-home COVID-19 test kits, reaching over 60,000 people. With support of CONÉCTATE, CHWs also received state certification.

## NEXT STEPS: SUSTAINING AND EXPANDING CONÉCTATE

To continue addressing social determinants of health among residents at risk of chronic disease, YCPHSD is seeking more funding for CHWs. This effort will support the ongoing translation of research into practice, ensuring community members receive the support they need to improve their health and well-being. The Arizona Department of Health Services aims to expand opportunities for county and clinic engagement. The AzPRC plans to publish the results of the UNIDOS intervention, highlighting the vital role of CHWs in addressing social determinants of health within the public health system.

## Reference

<sup>1</sup> Bloss JE, LePrevost CE, Zahra AG, et al. Advancing the health of migrant and seasonal farmworkers in the United States: identifying gaps in the existing literature, 2021. *Health Promot Pract.* 2022;23(3):432–444. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15248399211033308>

### Learn more!

AzPRC is one of 26 PRCs supported by the CDC for the 2019–2024 funding cycle. Visit the [AzPRC website](#) to learn more about its work.