

# Community Health Worker

## Core Competencies – Resource Guide



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## What Is a CHW?

A CHW is the frontline health worker that most directly impacts patients' quality of life and helps guarantee their access to proper medical care and assistance when needed.

Community health workers (CHWs), and other health promoters like community health representatives, *promotores de salud*, peer educators, and others play a key role in their communities' long-term well-being. They work toward health equity and advocate on behalf of minorities and underserved populations. They provide health education, preventive screenings, promoting healthy lifestyles, and social support and guidance in terms of health care.

## CHW Core Competencies

The following is a summarized list of core competencies to be a CHW. Each competency includes a list of key skills. [Download a copy of this list in the Core Competencies Resources Guide to take with you.](#)

Some states have individual core competencies for their CHW program, and many include professional development courses in health-specific topics such as managing chronic illnesses or maternal and child health topics. Some states offer certification, and some have grandparenting programs for CHWs with similar skills. Also read about the [most important job skills to build a CHW career path](#).

### 1. Advocacy Skills

- Connect clients with the right health care
- Involve the community in clients' issues by promoting causes and using existing resources
- Educate community members, legislators, the media and other professionals or organizations about clients' issues
- Use social media as an advocacy platform

### 2. Community Outreach and Engagement

- Build and strengthen communities
- Educate community members about programs and services that benefit them using [community outreach](#)
- Understand various populations and how to communicate with them
- Understand the needs of different populations

- Learn to build collaborative relationships with colleagues and partners

### 3. Communication Skills

- Learn about the different ways we communicate, including verbally and non-verbally
- Use active and empathetic communication skills
- Look out for and overcome barriers to communication
- Be a clearer communicator, both when speaking and when writing
- Connect clients to resources in their language, including medical interpreters and translated documents

### 4. Promoting Healthy Lifestyles/Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL)

- Inform clients about the benefits of healthy eating and physical activity
- Help clients manage or even avoid chronic illness by adopting healthy lifestyle habits
- Improve health outcomes
- Strengthen community linkages
- Overcome barriers to healthy choices in environments, including food insecurity and other limitations

### 5. Cultural Competence and Responsiveness

- Understand the role culture plays in a person's health, including behaviors, language, customs, beliefs, and perspectives
- Learn culturally appropriate and respectful ways of communicating
- Use empathy to connect with people who come from various backgrounds
- Deliver health care services that meet the social, cultural, and linguistic needs of patients to avoid [health disparities](#)
- Build relationships with partners and colleagues to deliver culturally and linguistically appropriate services

### 6. Service Coordination Skills

- Improve collaboration among team members
- Appreciate the importance of support roles in case management
- Learn to leverage community resources in patient care
- Become an effective liaison with sources outside the community
- Effectively manage cases from first instance to follow-up

## 7. Individual and Assessment Skills

- Develop a keen understanding of contextual factors in assessing individuals within your community
- Discover formal assessment methods to get actively involved in community initiatives
- Feel confident designing, implementing, and interpreting individual assessments, including home evaluations
- Learn to design, implement, and interpret community-wide assessments and initiatives
- Help teams channel define unique needs within the community

## 8. Health Insurance Basics

- Understand the local health insurance landscape
- Help patients successfully [navigate the intricacies of health insurance](#)
- Connect community members with the resources that best serve their needs and the key role preventive services play in long-term health
- Provide accurate information about the types of insurance and the medical services available to the community, as well as potential costs
- Inform the legal and technical aspects of the healthcare industry

## 9. Teaching Skills

- Improve the ability to break complex topics into manageable information
- Collect pertinent health information from and for community members
- Plan and conduct health classes for varied audiences
- Use cultural context to bring accurate, relevant information to community members
- Measure community members' understanding in key health issues to help predict outcomes

## 10. Organizational Skills

- Organize schedules, shifts, and reporting on team members and priorities to maintain clear communication with supervisors or the work team
- Plan goals for individuals and the organization, taking priorities, budget, and other aspects into account
- Establish a safe space for coworkers with open, clear communication
- Take charge of event organization, both internal and external (workshops, outreach efforts, educational presentations, and more)

- Oversee project development and ensure that priorities and objectives are being met

#### **11. Community Capacity Building**

- Help team and community members explore their capacities
- Empower the community to make conscious choices
- Build connections, support, and allyship within communities
- Help individuals advocate for themselves through empowerment and education
- Lead community initiatives confidently, as well as identify local leaders and provide them with support

#### **12. Professional Conduct and Interpersonal Skills**

- Learn to manage time, resources, and priorities on an individual basis while balancing stressors
- Assess situations and determine risk factors and potential solutions
- Utilize the available resources to their best potential, including technology, assessment tools, and more
- Adhere to ethical and standards including codes of ethics, laws, bills, and other institutional guidelines
- Assume professional education and self-improvement as a pillar for personal development

#### **13. Public Health**

- Develop a deep understanding of the public health structure
- Understand the role and responsibilities that fall on CHW's shoulders as frontline health workers
- Identify challenges and opportunities in communities by addressing the four pillars of public health
- Combine theoretical knowledge and culturally relevant experience to understand public health on a local scale
- Dive into the complex nature and root causes of some of today's biggest health challenges, and explore how these affect healthcare services and populations

## Listing of State CHW Certification Requirements

State	Official site	Requirements for Certification	Key Roles	Key Topics	CHW Training Learning Tracks
Alabama		No state activity known			
Alaska	<a href="http://www.akchap.org/">http://www.akchap.org/</a>	<a href="#">The Community Health Aide Program of Alaska has a 4-week training program. Certification is required for Medicaid reimbursement.</a>	Advocacy/media tion Health education	Advocacy skills Communication skills Health literacy: A start Providing social support	Core skills Healthy lifestyles
Arizona	<a href="https://www.azdhs.gov/prevention/tobacco-chronic-disease/community-health-workers/index.php">https://www.azdhs.gov/prevention/tobacco-chronic-disease/community-health-workers/index.php</a>	<a href="#">The Arizona Department of Health Services' Arizona CHW Certification Advisory Council is in charge of certifications. However, these are voluntary as the state is developing a program.</a>	Chronic disease management Health education	Health Literacy: A Start Promoting healthy lifestyles Providing Social Support Improving asthma outcomes	Chronic Illness Healthy Lifestyles
Arkansas	<a href="https://www.archwa.org/">https://www.archwa.org/</a>	<a href="#">The Arkansas Community Health Worker Association has a list of training requirements for certification, which is currently voluntary.</a>	Chronic illness prevention Improving living conditions	Providing Social Support Substance use Behavioral health care	Chronic Illness Healthy Lifestyles
California	<a href="https://www.cdph.ca.gov/">https://www.cdph.ca.gov/</a>	The state of California is working with the private sector to develop CHW policies, including certification, under the state's Medicaid program.	Asthma management Chronic illness prevention		

Colorado	<a href="https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdphe/health-navigator">https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdphe/health-navigator</a>	Not required	Chronic illness prevention Improving living conditions Maternal and child's health	Providing Social Support Substance use Behavioral health care Cervical cancer and HPV	Chronic Illness
Connecticut	<a href="https://www.cpha.info/?page=CHWACT">https://www.cpha.info/?page=CHWACT</a>	<a href="#">The state of Connecticut made certificates a requirement in 2020.</a>	Chronic illness prevention	Promoting healthy lifestyles Behavioral health care HIV/AIDS: Supporting community members Substance use	Chronic Illness
Delaware	<a href="https://www.dehealthinnovation.org/">https://www.dehealthinnovation.org/</a>	<a href="#">The state is considering a voluntary certification program.</a>	Advocacy/media tation Health education Information counseling		Core skills
Florida	<a href="https://floridachw.org/">https://floridachw.org/</a>	Voluntary certification	Chronic disease management	Promoting healthy lifestyles Health literacy: A start High blood pressure Diabetes and Prediabetes Depression and anxiety: Help others cope	Chronic Illness



Georgia	<a href="https://dph.georgia.gov/community-health-workers">https://dph.georgia.gov/community-health-workers</a>	Resource Mothers require successful completion of a training module as well as ongoing training in order to qualify for Medicaid reimbursement. Other than this, the CHWI in Georgia is a relatively new development.	Chronic illness prevention	Health Literacy: A Start Promoting healthy lifestyles Providing Social Support Improving asthma outcomes	Chronic Illness
Hawaii		The Department of Health in Hawaii requested a task force for certification and training to the Hawaii Department of Human Services. So far, certification is available but not required.			
Idaho	<a href="https://ship.idaho.gov/WorkGroups/CommunityHealthWorkers/tabid/3054/Default.aspx">https://ship.idaho.gov/WorkGroups/CommunityHealthWorkers/tabid/3054/Default.aspx</a>	Not required	Advocacy/media tion Direct services (first aid/screenings) Social support Health education	Advocacy skills Communication skills Health literacy: A start Providing social support	Core Skills
Illinois	<a href="https://chwnetwork.wordpress.com">https://chwnetwork.wordpress.com</a>	2021 legislation makes CHW certification a requirement to submit Medicaid claims.			
Indiana	<a href="https://inchw.betterme.info/">https://inchw.betterme.info/</a>	Certification is a requirement for Medicaid reimbursement.	Preventive services Advocacy/media tion Telemedicine	Communication skills Health literacy: A Start Providing Social Support	

			Medical/behavioral settings	Substance use Behavioral health care	
Iowa		Not required			
Kansas	<a href="https://kschw.org/">https://kschw.org/</a>	Not required	Chronic illness prevention	Providing Social Support Substance use Behavioral health care	Chronic Illness Healthy Lifestyles
Kentucky	<a href="https://chfs.ky.gov/agencies/dph/dpqi/cdpb/Pages/chwp.aspx">https://chfs.ky.gov/agencies/dph/dpqi/cdpb/Pages/chwp.aspx</a>	Certification is not required, but the Kentucky Department of Public Health launched a statewide certification program in 2019.	Advocacy/media Chronic illness prevention Improving living conditions	Communication skills Health literacy: A Start Providing Social Support Substance use Behavioral health care	Chronic Illness Healthy Lifestyles
Louisiana	<a href="https://www.lachon.org/">https://www.lachon.org/</a>	Louisiana has developed a program for standardized training for CHWs -- instead of a certification.			Healthy Lifestyles
Maine	<a href="https://www.mcdph.org/">https://www.mcdph.org/</a>	Not required	Health education Improving living conditions	Promoting healthy lifestyles Communication skills Family planning and wellness Behavioral health care	Core Skills

Maryland	<a href="https://pophealth.health.maryland.gov/Community-Health-Workers/Pages/Certification-Program.aspx">https://pophealth.health.maryland.gov/Community-Health-Workers/Pages/Certification-Program.aspx</a>	Not required. The Workgroup on Workforce Development for CHWs recommended that certification be considered.		Advocacy Skills Communication Cultural competency Care coordination	Core Skills Healthy Lifestyles
Massachusetts	<a href="https://www.machw.org/">https://www.machw.org/</a>	Voluntary certification	Improving living conditions	Promoting healthy lifestyles Communication skills Family planning and wellness Behavioral health care	Chronic Illness
Michigan	<a href="https://www.michwa.org/">https://www.michwa.org/</a>	Not required	Advocacy/media tion Health education Chronic disease management	Advocacy skills Communication skills Health literacy: A start Providing social support	Chronic Illness
Minnesota	<a href="https://www.health.state.mn.us/facilities/ruralhealth/emerging/chw/index.html">https://www.health.state.mn.us/facilities/ruralhealth/emerging/chw/index.html</a>	Not required for employment, but required for Medical Assistance reimbursement for services provided to MN Health Care Program enrollees.	Chronic disease management Health education	Promoting healthy lifestyles Health literacy: A start High blood pressure Diabetes and Prediabetes Depression and anxiety: Help others cope	Core skills

Mississippi	<a href="https://msdh.ms.gov/">https://msdh.ms.gov/</a>	Not required	Health education Medication adherence Advocacy/media tion	Advocacy skills Communication skills Health literacy: A start Providing social support	Core skills
Missouri	<a href="https://health.mo.gov/professionals/community-health-workers/">https://health.mo.gov/professionals/community-health-workers/</a>	<a href="#">The Statewide CHW Advisory Committee is discussing certification and recommended core competencies, which were approved by the Department of Health and Senior Services.</a>	Advocacy/media tion Health education	Advocacy skills Communication skills Health literacy: A start Providing social support	Core skills
Montana	<a href="https://csimt.gov/wp-content/uploads/White-Paper-MT-Community-Health-Workers-03152016.pdf">https://csimt.gov/wp-content/uploads/White-Paper-MT-Community-Health-Workers-03152016.pdf</a>	Not required	Advocacy/media tion Health education	Advocacy skills Communication skills Health literacy: A start Providing social support	Chronic Illness
Nebraska	<a href="http://dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/Health-Navigation.aspx">http://dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/Health-Navigation.aspx</a>	Not currently. Indian Health Service certifies Community Health Representatives. The NE CHW Coalition Steering Committee Standards Workgroup developed certification recommendations.	Advocacy/media tion	Promoting healthy lifestyles Health literacy: A start High blood pressure Diabetes and Prediabetes Depression and anxiety: Help others cope Improving	Core skills Healthy Lifestyles

				Asthma Outcomes	
Nevada	<a href="https://www.nvchwa.org/">https://www.nvchwa.org/</a>	Not required to practice, but required for Medicaid reimbursement.	Advocacy/media tion	Advocacy skills Communication skills Health literacy Navigating health insurance	Core skills
New Hampshire	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/NHCHWcoalition/">https://www.facebook.com/NHCHWcoalition/</a>	The certification program is currently being developed.	Improving living conditions	Promoting healthy lifestyles Health literacy: A start High blood pressure Diabetes and Prediabetes Depression and anxiety: Help others cope Improving Asthma Outcomes	Core skills Healthy Lifestyles
New Jersey	<a href="https://www.nj.gov/health/fhs/chw/">https://www.nj.gov/health/fhs/chw/</a>	The NJDOH has developed an institute with the goal of developing standardized training and certification for CHWs.	Nutrition and fitness Tobacco control Chronic disease management	Promoting healthy lifestyles Health literacy: A start High blood pressure Diabetes and Prediabetes Depression and	Healthy Lifestyles

				anxiety: Help others cope Improving Asthma Outcomes	
New Mexico	<a href="https://nmhealth.org/">https://nmhealth.org/</a>	Certification is voluntary and through Department of Health. Applicants must complete a Department-approved training program and demonstrate proficiency in CHW core competencies.	Care coordination Health risk assessment	Providing Social Support Substance use Behavioral health care Cancer Genetics and Genomics: Breast Cancer Cervical cancer and HPV	Healthy lifestyles
New York	<a href="https://www.health.ny.gov/community/adults/women/maternal_and_infant_comm_health_collaboratives.htm">https://www.health.ny.gov/community/adults/women/maternal_and_infant_comm_health_collaboratives.htm</a>	Not required	Maternal and child's health for underserved communities	Providing Social Support Substance use Behavioral health care Cancer Genetics and Genomics: Breast Cancer Cervical cancer and HPV	Healthy lifestyles
North Carolina	<a href="https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/office-rural-health/community-health-workers">https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/office-rural-health/community-health-workers</a>	Not required	Improving living conditions	Promoting healthy lifestyles Communication skills Family planning and wellness Behavioral health care	Core skills Healthy Lifestyles

North Dakota	<a href="https://www.ndrha.org/">https://www.ndrha.org/</a>	<a href="#">The state is exploring the possibility of a CHW program.</a>	Improving living conditions	Promoting healthy lifestyles Communication skills Family planning and wellness Behavioral health care	Core skills Healthy Lifestyles
Ohio	<a href="https://nursing.ohio.gov/licensing-certification-ce/community-health-workers/">https://nursing.ohio.gov/licensing-certification-ce/community-health-workers/</a>	Board of Nursing issues and renews certificates biennially; continuing education required. Individuals must be at least 18 years old, have a high school diploma, complete the CHW training program, and pass criminal background check. CHW must be supervised by a health professional and is restricted from performing services requiring a professional license.	Access to quality health services	Promoting healthy lifestyles Communication skills Family planning and wellness Behavioral health care	Core skills Healthy Lifestyles
Oklahoma	<a href="https://oklahomaworks.gov/docs/2017/10/Healthcare-Proposed-Legislation-10-27-17.pdf">https://oklahomaworks.gov/docs/2017/10/Healthcare-Proposed-Legislation-10-27-17.pdf</a>	Not required			
Oregon	<a href="https://www.orchwa.org/">https://www.orchwa.org/</a>	Encouraged but not required for employment. Only certified CHWs participate in Health Homes. CHWs can apply for certification after completing a state-	Chronic illness prevention Improving living conditions	Providing Social Support Substance use Behavioral health care	Core skills Healthy Lifestyles

		approved training program.			
Pennsylvania		Not required	Home services Health education Improving living conditions	Promoting healthy lifestyles Communication skills Family planning and wellness Behavioral health care Improving asthma outcomes	Core skills Healthy Lifestyles
Rhode Island	<a href="https://chwassociationri.wixsite.com/chwari">https://chwassociationri.wixsite.com/chwari</a>	Rhode Island's community health workers have a state-operated program available for certification.	Health education Advocacy/mediation	Promoting healthy lifestyles Communication skills Family planning and wellness Behavioral health care	Core skills Healthy Lifestyles
South Carolina	<a href="https://scchwa.org/">https://scchwa.org/</a>	Certification is voluntary. To get certified, CHWs must attend an approved core competency course and take the state exam.	Chronic illness prevention Improving living conditions	Providing Social Support Substance use Behavioral health care	Chronic Illness



South Dakota	<a href="https://doh.sd.gov/diseases/chronic/heartdisease/chw.aspx">https://doh.sd.gov/diseases/chronic/heartdisease/chw.aspx</a>	The Community Health Worker Collaborative of South Dakota and the Department of Health are developing resources to support the CHW workforce in the state.			
Tennessee		No state activity known			
Texas	<a href="https://www.dshs.state.tx.us/mch/chw.shtm">https://www.dshs.state.tx.us/mch/chw.shtm</a>	Certification is required for every CHW in Texas. The Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) established and operates Promotor(a) or Community Health Worker Training and Certification Program for CHWs and instructors. Certification is for 2 years. DSHS reviews and approves all certification, training and continuing education. There are two CHW certification pathways in Texas: experience or training. The certification program also oversees certification for CHW training instructors and training programs/sponsoring organizations.	Advocacy/media Chronic disease management Health education	Promoting healthy lifestyles Health literacy: A start High blood pressure Diabetes and Prediabetes Depression and anxiety: Help others cope Improving Asthma Outcomes	Core skills Chronic Illness
Utah	<a href="https://choosehealth.utah.gov/healthcare/community-health-workers.php">https://choosehealth.utah.gov/healthcare/community-health-workers.php</a>	Not required. The Utah CHW Coalition is working		Providing social support	Core skills

		with the state to develop accreditation standards for future CHW training programs.	Language interpretation Culturally appropriate health information Assistance with applying for social services Guidance for overcoming barriers Informal counseling Setting and achieving health goals	Promoting healthy lifestyles Communication skills	
Vermont	<a href="https://www.healthvermont.gov/systems/health-professionals/community-health-workers">https://www.healthvermont.gov/systems/health-professionals/community-health-workers</a>	Not required. However, Community Colleges of Vermont launched a state-wide Community Health Certificate program.	Advocacy/media Patient assistance Improving living conditions	Navigating health insurance Providing social support Promoting healthy lifestyles Communication skills	Core skills
Virginia	<a href="http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/content/uploads/sites/76/2019/07/Office-of-Chronic-Disease-CHW-presentation.pdf">http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/content/uploads/sites/76/2019/07/Office-of-Chronic-Disease-CHW-presentation.pdf</a>	The CHW Association and CHW Advisory Group are looking at certification options.	Advocacy/media Health education Improving living conditions	Navigating health insurance Providing social support Promoting healthy lifestyles Communication skills	Core skills Healthy Lifestyles

Washington	<a href="https://hcwcommunityhealthworker.org/">https://hcwcommunityhealthworker.org/</a>	Not required	Advocacy/mediation Health education Improving living conditions	Navigating health insurance Providing social support Promoting healthy lifestyles Communication skills	Core skills
West Virginia		Not required	In-home services	Providing social support Promoting healthy lifestyles Communication skills	Core skills
Wisconsin	<a href="https://www.wicomhealthfund.org/community-health-worker-network">https://www.wicomhealthfund.org/community-health-worker-network</a>	Not required	Advocacy/mediation Health education Improving living conditions	Navigating health insurance Providing social support Promoting healthy lifestyles Communication skills	Core skills
Wyoming		No state activity known			

## Additional Resources

### Earn CHW Core Competencies for Your Team!

CHWTraining delivers health-specific online courses in a single annual subscription. Your team members can take interactive courses and download useful resources at their own pace. Customize your learning by choosing courses from the following learning tracks:

- Core Skills
- Chronic Diseases
- Healthy Living

At the conclusion of your self-guided study, CHWTraining will provide assessments and certificates of completion.

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