

## Workgroup for Workforce Development for Community Health Workers

### Sample Definitions of CHWs

#### **APHA CHW Section (this is also the definition used by New Mexico and Michigan):**

A Community Health Worker (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.

#### **Minnesota Definition:**

Community Health Workers (CHWs) come from the communities they serve, building trust and vital relationships. This trusting relationship enables CHWs to be effective links between their own communities and systems of care. This crucial relationship significantly lowers health disparities in Minnesota because CHWs: provide access to services, improve the quality and cultural competence of care, create an effective system of chronic disease management, and increase the health knowledge and self sufficiency of underserved populations.

#### **Massachusetts Definition:**

Community Health Workers are public health workers who apply their unique understanding of the experience, language, and/or culture of the populations they serve in order to carry out one or more of the following roles:

- Providing culturally appropriate health education, information, and outreach in community-based settings, such as homes, schools, clinics, shelters, local businesses, and community centers;
- Bridging/culturally mediating between individuals, communities and health and human services, including actively building individual and community capacity;
- Assuring that people access the services they need;
- Providing direct services, such as informal counseling, social support, care coordination, and health screenings; and
- Advocating for individual and community needs.

CHWs are distinguished from other health professionals because they:

- Are hired primarily for their understanding of the populations and communities they serve;
- Conduct outreach a significant portion of the time in one or more of the categories above;
- Have experience providing services in community settings.”

**Texas Definition:**

A Promotor(a) or Community Health Worker is a person who, with or without compensation is a liaison and provides cultural mediation between health care and social services, and the community. A promotor(a) or community health worker: is a trusted member, and has a close understanding of, the ethnicity, language, socio-economic status, and life experiences of the community served. A promotor(a) or community health worker assists people to gain access to needed services and builds individual, community, and system capacity by increasing health knowledge and self-sufficiency through a range of activities such as outreach, patient navigation and follow-up, community health education and information, informal counseling, social support, advocacy, and participation in clinical research.

**Bureau of Labor Definition (21-1094):**

Community Health Workers: assist individuals and communities to adopt healthy behaviors; conduct outreach for medical personnel or health organizations to implement programs in the community that promote, maintain, and improve individual and community health; may provide information on available resources, provide social support and informal counseling, advocate for individuals and community health needs, and provide services such as first aid and blood pressure screening; may collect data to help identify community health needs. Excludes "Health Educators" (21-1091).

**Affordable Care Act Definition (sec. 5313):**

CHWs are workers who promote health or nutrition within the community in which an individual resides by :

- a) serving as a liaison between communities and health care agencies;
- b) providing guidance and social assistance to community residents;
- c) enhancing community residents' ability to effectively communicate with health care providers;
- d) providing culturally and linguistically appropriate health and nutrition education;
- e) advocating for individual and community health;
- f) providing referral and follow-up services or otherwise coordinating; and
- g) proactively identifying and enrolling eligible individuals in Federal, State, and local private or nonprofit health and human services programs."

(Affordable Care Act, quoted in Brownstein et al., 2011b)

**HRSA Definition (2007):**

Community health workers are lay members of communities who work either for pay or as volunteers in association with the local health care system in both urban and rural environments and usually share ethnicity, language, socioeconomic status and life experiences with the community members they serve. They have been identified by many titles such as community health advisors, lay health advocates, "promotores(as)," outreach educators, community health representatives, peer health promoters, and peer health educators. CHWs offer interpretation and translation services, provide culturally appropriate health education and information, assist people in receiving the care they need, give informal counseling

and guidance on health behaviors, advocate for individual and community health needs, and provide some direct services such as first aid and blood pressure screening.

**Oregon defines a set of three related “Non-Traditional Health Workers”:**

OR House Bill 3650 defines community health workers, peer wellness specialists and personal health navigators. For ease of translation, we have used “non-traditional health workers” to encompass all three worker types:

**1. Community Health Worker** means an individual who promotes health or nutrition within the community in which the individual resides, by:

- a) Serving as a liaison between communities, individuals and coordinated care organizations;
- b) Providing health or nutrition guidance and social assistance to community residents;
- c) Enhancing community residents’ ability to effectively communicate with health care providers;
- d) Providing culturally and linguistically appropriate health or nutrition education;
- e) Advocating for individual and community health;
- f) Conducting home visitations to monitor health needs and reinforce treatment regimens;
- g) Identifying and resolving issues that create barriers to care for specific individuals;
- h) Providing referral and follow-up services or otherwise coordinating health and social service options; and,
- i) Proactively identifying and enrolling eligible individuals in federal, state, local, private or nonprofit health and human services programs.

**2. Peer Wellness Specialists.** For peer workers providing services in the field of behavioral health and addictions recovery, the State currently provides a definition for Peer Support Specialists only. Peer Support Specialists are those who provide peer delivered services to an individual or family member with similar life experience, under the supervision of a qualified Clinical Supervisor. A Peer Support Specialist must complete an Addictions and Mental Health-approved training program and be:

- (a) A self-identified person currently or formerly receiving mental health services; or
- (b) A self-identified person in recovery from a substance use disorder, who meets the abstinence requirements for recovering staff in alcohol and other drug treatment programs; or
- (c) A family member of an individual who is a current or former recipient of addictions or mental health services.

The terminology “peer wellness specialist” is defined by peer support specialists who seek to expand the role from services focused on behavioral health and addictions recovery to include physical health promotion, and disease prevention and intervention activities for individuals and their families who experience mental health and substance abuse challenges. Peer wellness specialists receive training focused specifically reducing the levels of co-morbidity and shortened lifespan that are endemic among persons with behavioral health issues, and be active participants on primary care health teams.

**3. Personal Health Navigator** means an individual who provides information, assistance, tools and support to enable a patient to make the best health care decisions in the person's particular circumstances and in light of the patient's needs, lifestyle, combination of conditions and desired outcomes.

### **Other Related professions**

**Health Educators** provide and manage health education programs that help individuals, families, and their communities maximize and maintain healthy lifestyles. Collect and analyze data to identify community needs prior to planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating programs designed to encourage healthy lifestyles, policies, and environments. May serve as resource to assist individuals, other health professionals, or the community, and may administer fiscal resources for health education programs. Excludes "Community Health Workers" (Bureau of Labor, 21-1094).