

Community Health Workers in Vermont

Professional Identity Snapshot: Roles and Responsibilities

March 2022

Introduction

This brief provides a summary of key data points about the professional identity of community health workers (CHWs) derived from a May 2021 surveyⁱ of 128 CHWs and 33 CHW employers from across Vermont. The survey, conducted by the Vermont Department of Health (VDH), in collaboration with the Vermont CHW Steering Committee, represents an ongoing effort by VDH to collect information about the roles, scope of work, skills, and training of the current CHW workforce in the state.

Vermont CHW Definition

In 2019, the Vermont CHW Steering Committee developed a Vermont CHW definition to promote understanding and recognition of the role. 96% of CHWs agreed that the definition describes their work.

Vermont CHW Definition:

A Community Health Worker (CHW) is a frontline public health professional who is a **trusted member of or has a close understanding of the community being served**. A CHW uses a **person-centered approach** to build trusting relationships that enable the CHW to serve as a **liaison between health and social services and the community** to facilitate access to services and improve the quality and cultural and linguistic competence of service delivery. In addition, a CHW **increases self-sufficiency, wellbeing and positive health outcomes** through a range of activities such as outreach, community education, supportive guidance, self-management, coaching and the provision of social support and advocacy.

Job Titles

CHWs can go by many titles, while still fulfilling the same duties as a CHW. CHWs listed over 47 different job titles, with SASHⁱⁱ coordinator (27%), CHW (26%), and family support worker (14%) being the top three most common. In comparison, CHW employers listed over 32 different titles for those they employ/supervise, with CHW (33%), community care coordinator (17%), and outreach specialist (17%) being the most common.

Highlights

CHW Work & Roles

47 different job titles

66% work with individuals living with a disability

62% address mental/behavioral health

CHW Activities



Bridging the gap between people and health systems



Advocacy



Care coordination / system navigation



Health coaching and social support

Most Common Connections to Services

Food assistance

Mental/behavioral health

Housing

Case management

Transportation

Source: 2021 Vermont Community Health Worker Survey

Learn more at healthvermont.gov/CHWs

CHW PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

Scope of Practice

The activities that CHWs most commonly mentioned performing in their positions include bridging the gap between individuals, communities, and the health and social services systems (86%); advocating for individuals and communities (79%); and participating in care coordination and system navigation (75%).

The activities that CHW employers reported as the most common among their CHWs were slightly different. The most common activities reported by CHW employers were bridging the gap between individuals, communities, and the health and social services systems (85%); providing direct service (81%); participating in care coordination and system navigation (78%); and providing health coaching and social support (78%).

	CHWs	Employers
Bridge the gap between individuals, communities, and the health and social services systems	86%	85%
Advocate for individuals and communities	79%	74%
Participate in care coordination and system navigation	75%	78%
Provide health coaching and social support	71%	78%
Conduct outreach	60%	74%
Provide direct service	58%	81%
Conduct individual and community assessments	55%	48%
Help build individual and community capacity	50%	56%
Provide culturally and linguistically appropriate health education and information	45%	59%
Conduct case management	37%	37%
Participate in evaluation and research	29%	30%

Populations and Services

CHWs work with a variety of populations and with a variety of mental and physical health conditions. The most common special populations CHWs reported working with are individuals with disabilities (66%), older adults (62%), and individuals with a substance use disorder or who are in recovery (55%). The most common health conditions or chronic diseases that CHWs address include mental/behavioral health (62%), diabetes (57%), and substance use (53%). When asked which race/ethnicity groups they mostly work with, CHWs reported working with white (92%), Black/ African American (21%), Asian/Asian American (17%), Hispanic/Latino (14%), Native American/Indigenous/First Nation (12%) and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander (8%).

Special Populations CHWs Serve (Top 11)

Individuals living with a disability	66%
Older adults (65+)	62%
Substance use disorder or in recovery	55%
History of frequent hospitalization	51%
Rural residents	45%
Experiencing homelessness	41%
Without primary care provider	39%
Children/adolescents	37%
LGBTQ	35%
Uninsured	35%
Pregnant or postpartum women & infants	32%

Health Conditions CHWs Address (Top 11)

Mental/behavioral health	62%
Diabetes	57%
Substance use	53%
Disabilities	52%
Hypertension	50%
Tobacco cessation	48%
Obesity	41%
Heart disease	40%
Dementia/Alzheimer's	40%
Falls prevention	39%
COVID-19	37%

CHW PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

Connecting to Services

CHWs connect their clients or patients to a wide variety of services, the five most common being:



Food assistance organizations/food pantries (84%)



Mental/behavioral health services (80%)



Housing (69%)



Case management (67%)



Transportation (67%)

Next Steps

The Vermont Community Health Worker Steering Committee directs efforts to accomplish sustainable change in promoting and supporting the work of Community Health Workers in Vermont. The committee plans to conduct ongoing surveys to collect critical information to inform the statewide priorities to recognize and advance the work of Community Health Workers in Vermont.

For more information: Visit [Healthvermont.gov/CHWS](https://healthvermont.gov/CHWS) or contact Jennifer Woolard, jennifer.woolard@vermont.gov



ⁱ **A note about survey methods and respondents:** Data for this brief was gathered from a web-based survey (administered 05/03/2021–05/28/2021) of a convenience sample of CHWs and CHW employers across Vermont. A total of 145 CHWs and 33 CHW employers responded to the survey. Upon analysis, VDH and PDA excluded 17 participants from the analysis+ they did not appear to be CHWs. This was the second year VDH gathered information via surveys about CHW professionals and organizations that engage CHWs. It is not clear the extent to which the responses are representative of all CHWs or all organizations that engage CHWs in Vermont.

ⁱⁱ Support and Services at Home

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