

OVERVIEW

Community health workers are often described as trusted and respected members of the community. They provide information, education, and formal and informal community-based, health-related services. They establish a vital communications link between community members and community health services.

The scope of work and roles of community health workers vary by program. For example, community health workers may

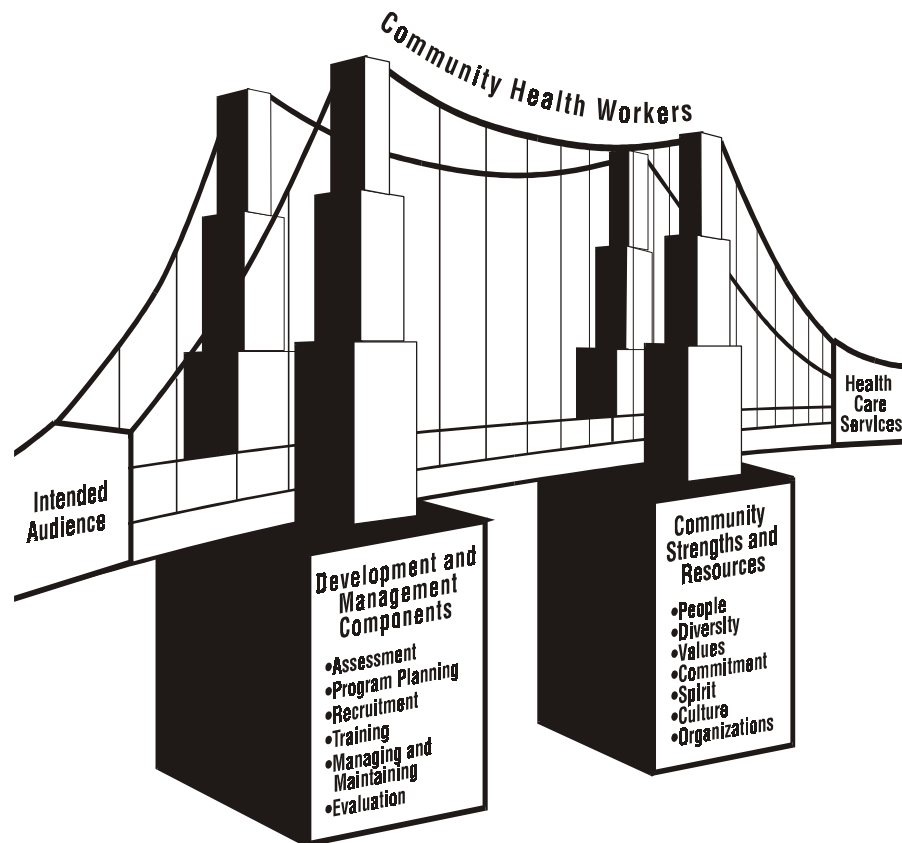
- Provide culturally appropriate health information;
- Work with people to help them obtain needed services;
- Provide informal counseling and social support;
- Advocate for community needs; and
- Provide direct service.

Community health worker is a general term that will be used to mean a peer educator, outreach worker, community health advisor, lay health worker, volunteer, community health representative, or promotor/a. Community health workers are selected from the intended audience. By training local people, the community is empowered to act toward its own health promotion.

The definition above reflects how grantees of the breast and cervical cancer early detection program integrate community health workers into their programs. Many community health worker programs have not been evaluated extensively. However, community health worker programs that match the sociodemographics of the client population have been shown to be more effective. The National Training Center for the Prevention and Early Detection of Cancer recommends that programs recruit community health workers who match the sociodemographics of the client population.

Overall, community health workers serve as a bridge between a community and its available health care services. They are supported by six building blocks of effective community health worker programs and the strengths and resources of the community.

Key Components of Community Health Worker Programs



These six key components serve as a framework for developing and managing effective community health worker programs. As the study of this health care strategy evolves, so will the understanding of these key components.

The topics covered in this handbook are applicable to community health worker programs in a variety of health-related issue areas. The public education coordinator of your State, Tribal, or Territorial breast and cervical cancer early detection program can provide more in-depth coverage of the topics as they relate to cancer prevention and control. The development and management components of effective community health worker programs, as depicted in the graphic, are described below.

If you do not know how to contact your State, Tribal, or Territorial BCCEDP, contact your State health department for more information.