



National Indian Health Board NATIONAL TRIBAL COVID-19 RESPONSE

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COVID 19 and Community-based Health Work

What is a Community Health Worker?

Community Health Workers (CHWs) are individuals who provide some level of public health service and often work in underserved areas or with hard-to-reach populations. In Indian Country, community health workers include and typically refer to Community Health Representatives (CHRs), but can also include other front line service providers such as maternal and child health home visitors, peer educators, and some social service workers. CHRs and CHWs are generally seen as a 'trusted' voice within the community, and can serve to disseminate health-related information. During a heightened public health response, such as during a pandemic, they can play a significant role in response effort

What Roles Can a CHW or CHR fulfill during this pandemic?

- Create connections for vulnerable populations
 - Reduce social isolation
- Provide culturally appropriate health education
 - Advocate for underserved individuals
- Build capacity while addressing health issues
- Provide harm and risk reduction counseling
 - Conduct health screenings
 - Provide referrals
- Conduct wellness checks on elders and vulnerable community members
 - Deliver medicines, food and other needed supplies/materials
 - Provide low-risk transport for community members
 - Contact tracing and disease surveillance
 - Conduct community assessments



CHW's/CHR's can aide in the reduction of the mortality rate, they serve and have Tribal cultural experience and training, and they're generally well connected to the Tribal community they serve. Often times recognized in the community for their abilities to keep the community engaged by building trusting relationships, CHW/CHR serves as liaisons to bridge the gaps between healthcare systems and the community.

Other Contributions of CHWs/CHRs in Tribal Communities

- Exercising Tribal self determination
- Protecting and honoring the rights and dignity of members of the community.
- Providing key health services to the community
- Promotion of cultural beliefs and practical benefits
- Promoting social justice for the underserved individuals in the community.
- Promoting the power in partnerships and health systems designed to serve Tribal communities.

Ways CHWs/CHRs Can Keep the Community and Themselves Healthy

CHWs and CHRs are a vital part of the Indian health system, and the services they can bring to an emergency response are equally important. Therefore, it is imperative that CHWs and CHRs adopt practices that will help keep themselves healthy when they are working in the community. Consider some of the following:

- Understand the scope of your services and the risk of the people being served
- Wash hand and disinfect frequently (including yourself, the care/transport, materials, etc.)
- Bring disinfectant, and cleaning materials to all visits and all outreach activities
- Maintain social and physical distancing, when appropriate, and avoid entering a home, if possible
- Bring extra pens, papers, clipboards, and other supplies so that you do not have to share
- Monitor your own health, and stay at home if you start feeling ill
- Consider using your own mode of transportation instead of a Tribal or GSA vehicle
- Wash your clothes each night immediately upon returning home, or wear scrubs provided by the local clinic/hospital that is put on at the facility at the start of a shift and removed at the facility at shift's end
- Take breaks and exercise high levels of self-care
- Wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), like masks, face shields, and gloves.

Resources/References

- American Diabetes Association, COVID-19: Community Health Worker Resources, <https://www.professional.diabetes.org/content-page/covid-19-community-health-worker-resources>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <https://www.cdc.gov/publichealthgateway/chw/index.html>
- Rural Health Information Hub, <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/toolkits/community-health-workers/1/roles>
- *Community Health Workers and Pandemic Preparedness: Current and Prospective Roles*, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6443984/>
- National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, COVID-19 Worker Training Resources, <https://tools.niehs.nih.gov/wetp/covid19worker/index.cfm>
- Indian Health Service, <https://www.ihs.gov/chr/>; <https://www.ihs.gov/chr/education/>
- National Association of Community Health Representatives, <https://www.nachr.net/>

Disclaimer:

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