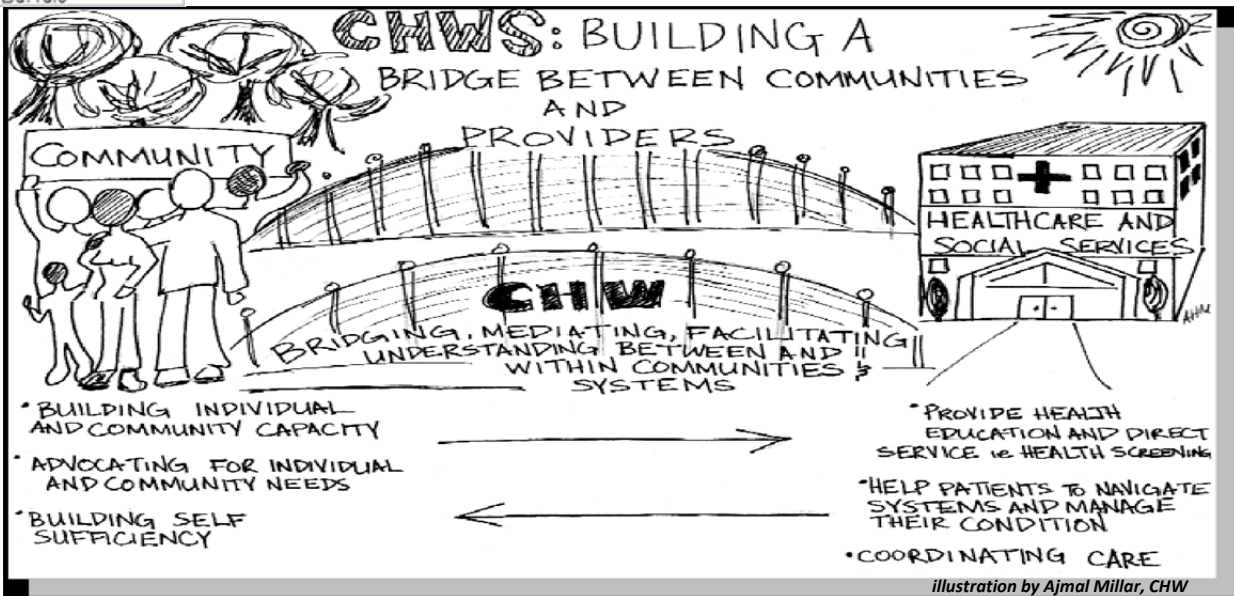


Community Health Workers

A cost effective solution for individual and community health



Community Health Workers are a proven way to improve health outcomes while reducing costs by addressing the social determinants of health.

This article describes several dimensions of this cost effectiveness, thereby making the **business case for the employment of Community Health Workers.**

What is a Community Health Worker?

Community Health Workers (CHWs) go by many names, including outreach workers, patient navigators, peer health educators, and lay health advocates. CHWs help people overcome obstacles by accompanying them through treatment, monitoring needs for food and housing, leading education campaigns, and empowering community members to take charge of their own health. As members of the communities they serve, CHWs establish relationships of trust with those they serve, bridging the gap between the clinic and community.¹ Community Health Workers embrace a holistic conception of health, working not only in health care, but also with the social determinants of health such as poverty, education, and housing. CHWs make connections between individuals, communities, and systems. CHWs help build individual and community capacity through a range of activities such as outreach, health education, home visiting, community organizing, informal counseling, social support, translation/interpretation and advocacy.² As of 2005, there were over 120,000 CHWs in the United States, working in a wide variety of settings, ranging from hospitals to churches, from neighborhood centers to schools.³

What are some roles that CHWs serve?

- Providing cultural mediation between communities and health and human services systems
- Providing informal counseling and social support
- Providing culturally appropriate health education
- Advocating for individual and community needs
- Ensuring that people obtain necessary services
- Building individual and community capacity
- Providing basic direct services⁴

The Business Case for Community Health Workers (October 2014) was compiled by Renee Cadzow, PhD and Jessica Bauer Walker, BA, CHW with input from the Community Health Worker Network Academic Advisory Council composed of experts from colleges, universities, health care institutions, and the Erie County Department of Health. For more information, go to <http://chwbuffalo.org>.



The Business Case for Community Health Workers

Hiring frontline workers of and from the communities they serve who address social determinants of health makes good economic sense!

Communities that have Community Health Workers

Have happier and healthier community members

Spend less time and money treating illness

Hiring Community Health Workers in your Agency/Institution SAVES MONEY and IMPROVES OUTCOMES. Here's how:

HEALTH CARE

CHWs help to improve access, quality, and coordination of care

- **Reduced use of hospital emergency department^{5,6}**
Community residents become aware of resources other than the emergency room to meet health care needs. One study found that CHWs linking people to primary care, social services, and other prevention resources resulted in a **\$2.38 ROI for every dollar** invested with the CHWs.
- **Access to health/disease screening⁷**
Community outreach efforts target underserved community residents and help link them to disease screening and prevention, and to facilitate early awareness of health problems and link to needed treatments.
- **Improves transitions of care⁵**
Improves the quality of hospital discharge and helps controlling recurrent readmissions in high risk patients.
- **Better adherence to medical advice^{8,9}**
Community residents receive assistance in getting to doctor's visits, filling prescriptions, understanding prescription dosage, and communicating with their doctors. Overall, CHWs enhance patient trust. In one study, CHWs working with people with diabetes resulted in a 38% reduction in emergency room visits leading to a 27% drop in Medicaid costs for the patients. Each CHW was responsible for **\$80,000 to \$90,000 dollars** in savings.⁹

WORKFORCE

CHW work is an ideal door for non-traditional students and unskilled workers to come through

- **Job opportunities for community members with lower educational attainment and/or limited English proficiency¹⁰⁻¹²**
Community members who may be considered "under-qualified" for most jobs actually make ideal CHW candidates, because they have much in common with the community.
Often people with limited formal education are funneled into difficult and low wage jobs like home health aides and nursing assistants. CHW work is another option, and can be designed with tracks for other careers and educational advancement.

Want to learn more? See the references cited and much more data to support hiring CHWs in your organization at <http://chwbuffalo.org>!

EDUCATION

Parents and students are ideally positioned to be CHWs through their peer-to-peer relationships with families

- **Better parent engagement in child school/learning environment¹³**
Parents in the community are encouraged and supported to become engaged and active participants in their child's learning and school environment.
- **School districts better meet the academic and non-academic needs of their students¹⁴**
CHWs help **promote health education** and facilitate policy change regarding the need for children to be active, eat well, and be physically and emotionally safe in order to perform well academically. Education, health, income are extremely interconnected, and schools integrating public health practices is smart prevention strategy for population health and a more productive society.

HOUSING, MENTAL HEALTH, SUBSTANCE ABUSE, PRENATAL CARE AND MORE!

Community members who have dealt personally with these issues are excellent candidates for CHWs

- **Improved access to safe housing^{15,16}**
CHWs first and foremost address basic needs of housing, food, and safety. It is well established that once community members are in safe places to live they are more able to address other social determinants of poor health and well-being. This results in fewer arrests, days in jail, injuries, emergency room visits, and nights spent in the hospital. Programs that link homeless people to housing have been found to save taxpayers **upwards of \$1.8 million**.
- **Linkage to substance abuse treatment services^{17,18}**
Community outreach targets high risk community residents to assist them in finding safe places to live followed by treatment for addiction and its associated complications.
- **Linkage to mental health services^{15,19-21}**
CHWs meet community residents "where they are" and help them acquire basic needs for survival and well-being. They also help secure treatment for mental health issues that often accompany poverty, discrimination, and violence.
- **Improved birth outcomes^{22,23}**
Mothers and families in the community receive assistance to maximize chances for healthy pregnancies, births, and children and increase spacing between pregnancies.



The Business Case for Community Health Workers
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