

Role of Community Health Workers in Addressing Health Disparities



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Meet Steven Abraham

Mr. Steven Abraham is a highly experienced individual with a rich history of improving the quality of life within the City of Omaha and the State of Nebraska. He has worked as a Community Health Worker Consultant with CHW Collaborative and a Molina Healthcare SUD Case Manager. He is a Licensed Alcohol Drug Counselor and has completed his Associate in Chemical Dependency Counseling from Metropolitan Community College and his Bachelor's in Behavioral Science from Bellevue University. Additionally, Mr. Abraham was the Sarpy County Personnel Board Chair and a Certified Medication Aide. Mr. Abraham is also the University of Nebraska Medical Center Community Health Worker Advisor.

In the past, Mr. Abraham has served as a Public Housing Community Health Worker at Charles Drew Health Center, Day House Manager at Siena Francis House, Omaha Project Homeless Connect Board Member, Resident Commissioner of Omaha Housing Authority, Point In Time Team Member, and Vice Chair of Nebraska Early Childhood Collaborative Policy Council. He has also worked as the 2020 Census Field Manager for Burt, Dodge, Douglas, and Washington Counties.

Mr. Abraham's notable achievements include securing a \$25M Choice Neighborhoods Implementation Grant during his tenure as a Commissioner of Omaha Housing Authority from 2015 to 2019. He oversaw the agency's operations, helped create policies, and adjusted essential programs, including the Housing Choice Voucher and Moderate Rehabilitation Program. Mr. Abraham also currently serves as one of the University of Nebraska Medical Center Community Health Worker Advisors where they secured a \$3M grant to provide a CHW Cohort.



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YESICA SALDANA

A Community Health Worker and Coordinator. She focuses on assisting the Minority population in Dakota County by advocating, addressing social determinants of health, and providing education and information on health topics such as diabetes prevention. Yesica is also an ESL Instructor, CHW Advisor, and a Nebraska Community Health Worker/Promotores Collaborative member. Her main interests lie in bridging gaps through workforce capacity building for Community Health Workers and addressing social determinants of health across underserved populations. In her free time, she enjoys spending time with her two daughters, Jasmin and Lilly.

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Nancie Velasquez

Nancie Velasquez has worked as the Community Health Manager for her tribe, the Ponca Tribe of Nebraska, for ten years. She's passionate about her job and ensuring that her patients/clients receive the best care possible. One of Nancie's main goals is to Create a CHW program that others would like to implement.

In her spare time, she likes spending time with her fiancé, family, three cats, and dogs. She also likes to drag her fiancé to estate sales, garage sales and go thrifting.



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The Role of Community Health Workers in Addressing Health Disparities



Community Health Workers (CHWs) deeply understand the community's culture, language, and social dynamics, which allows them to effectively bridge gaps in healthcare access and delivery.



Community Health Workers (CHWs) are vital in addressing health disparities, particularly in underserved communities. Community Health Workers are trusted community members who serve as liaisons between healthcare providers and the people they serve.



CHWs address Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) due to the knowledge, skills, and abilities they bring to their role. The social factors and needs for our community resources that impact our well-being are often beyond the scope of most health professionals.

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CHWs Contribute to Addressing Health Disparities by:



Education and Promotion



Outreach Advocacy and Navigation



Prevention and Management of Chronic Disease



Support and Care Coordination



Culturally Competent Care



Community Mobilization and Capacity Building

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Health Disparities In Nebraska

Poverty

Environmental threats

Inadequate access to healthcare

Individual and behavioral factors

Educational inequalities



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How Community Health Workers Can Help Address:

Inadequate access to healthcare

Individual and behavioral factors

- Community Health Workers play a crucial role in addressing inadequate access to healthcare and individual behavioral factors. As CHWs, we can discuss with community members the impact of high healthcare costs, which lead to high out of pocket expenses, even for patients with insurance. This acts as a significant barrier to accessing healthcare.
- When people are forced to choose between paying for food and rent or paying for healthcare, many choose to forgo healthcare. Transportation barriers also affect people in both urban and rural areas, with access to fuel becoming a barrier in some locations, and limited internet services this could lead to a lack of access to behavioral telehealth services and medical support.
- Implicit bias and healthcare avoidance are also contributing factors. One issue is that people may avoid seeking healthcare if they expect to experience discrimination and racial bias from healthcare providers. Possible solutions for all these types of issues include using community health workers to expand insurance to cover costs, extending telehealth services, investing in mobile clinics, educating about multiple healthcare sites, and improving cultural responsiveness.

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How Community Health Workers Can Help Address:

- CHWs can help provide education about class distinctions among populations and how eliminating property tax as the main source of funding for education can help level the playing field. Educational inequalities are knowing low-income students receive less through the current funding process. If the state government would allocate funds for public schools, it would help create fair and equally funded schools.
- Funding based on test scores should be deprioritized, as it discriminates against disadvantaged students, and affects teachers who should receive better financial support, including higher salaries and benefits, to improve retention and resources that are invested in low-income, underfunded schools, including increased support for special education specialists and counselors. School to prison pipeline also creates educational inequalities for students and has been suggested to be dismantled by adopting restorative justice efforts with a holistic approach.
- Community Health Workers could support efforts to reduce educational inequalities by testifying or lobbying to implement a tax system that imposes rates on the wealthy that will provide adequate support and funding for public sectors like public education and support for low-income families.



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How Community Health Workers Can Help Address:

- Poverty and environmental challenges can affect communities in different ways, despite ongoing efforts to define and understand their impacts. Poverty has significant effects on childhood experiences, decision-making, nutrition, and housing. It's important to note that understanding poverty doesn't mean blaming individuals, but rather shifting perspective to find effective solutions.
- Environmental threats include avoiding pesticide-contaminated produce, ensuring access to clean water, and addressing litter issues. Community health workers can help mitigate poverty by sharing information about affordable housing, job opportunities, and support services.
- They can also help address environmental threats by helping community members understand scientific and technological policies and connecting them with elected officials who can work on solutions for these issues.



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Client Story: Overcoming Health Disparities

I work in a clinical setting, and most of the elderly patients we have are not too trusting of Western medicine. One Elder I've been working with for seven years now is a cancer survivor due to me hounding her for three years to take a cancer screening test. The number one chronic health condition that kills Native Americans is cancer. Most Native Americans that I've worked with over the last ten years have admitted to ignoring symptoms of chronic health conditions due to discrimination, gaps in access to healthcare (no transportation, living in rural areas, homelessness), risk factors, and unhealthy lifestyles.

We try hard to work with our patients and use evidence-based motivational interviewing to help our patients. But I digress. Our female Elder is a 4-year colon cancer survivor due to my persistence and calming her trauma with doctors (she's also a boarding school survivor). I went to her appointments with her, took her to surgery, and made sure that she had a care package at home for any needs afterward. I checked in on her daily and ensured that other Elders would be with her for the first week.

Today, she's living a healthy lifestyle, more active than before, which is a clear testament to the positive impact of persistence and support in healthcare.

Nancie Velasquez

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Discussion Questions

1. **What approaches are you taking to address health disparities in your community?**
2. **Do you feel that health education in Nebraska has reduced the risk of health disparities? If not, what can be done to improve this?**



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Conclusion

Community health workers (CHWs) are crucial in addressing health disparities by providing culturally appropriate health education, outreach, and support services. Their unique position within communities allows them to bridge the cultural and linguistic gap between healthcare providers and patients, resulting in improved communication and better health outcomes. CHWs, with their tireless efforts, address barriers to healthcare access, assist with chronic disease prevention and management, and address and support social determinants of health (SDOH). By collaborating with public health practitioners, CHWs strengthen care delivery, enhance community engagement, and significantly contribute to achieving health equity for all, inspiring us all with their impactful work.

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Resources

<https://mhpsalud.org/portfolio-items/integrating-chws-health-disparities-initiatives>

<https://www.icliniq.com/articles/healthy-living-wellness-and-prevention/the-role-of-community-health-workers-in-addressing-health-disparities>

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Thank you

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