



Maryland Community Health Worker Core Competencies

A Community Health Worker (CHW) is a frontline public health worker who is a trusted member of, or has an unusually close understanding of, the community served. This trusting relationship enables a CHW to serve as a liaison to, link to, or intermediary between health and social services and the community to facilitate access to services and improve the quality and cultural competence of service delivery. A CHW also builds individual and community capacity by increasing health knowledge and self-sufficiency through a range of activities such as outreach, community education, the provision of information to support individuals in the community, social support and advocacy.

Community health workers go by many titles, depending on where they work, who they work for and what they do. Common titles include community health representative, community health advisor, community health outreach worker, outreach specialist, patient navigator, lay health advisor, health coach, community health coach, lay health advocate, family advocate, community health care worker, health educator, liaison, promoter, outreach worker, promotores de salud, peer counselor, health interpreter, public health aide, and more.

Community Health Worker core competencies identify abilities and skills that a CHW is expected to demonstrate within their profession. Maryland's nine CHW core competencies were established through the work of the [2014 - 2015 Workgroup on Workforce Development for Community Health Workers](#), the [State Community Health Worker Advisory Committee](#), analysis of national and other state core competencies and formal and informal input from a wide variety of stakeholders including Community Health Workers. Maryland's CHW core competencies are:

1. Advocacy and community capacity building skills
2. Effective oral and written communication skills
3. Cultural competency
4. Understanding of ethics and confidentiality issues
5. Knowledge of local resources and system navigation
6. Care coordination support skills
7. Teaching skills to promote healthy behavior change
8. Outreach methods and strategies
9. Understanding of public health concepts and health literacy

The table below provides some of the general skills and abilities that correspond to each core competency to assist CHWs, supervisors, trainers and other stakeholders to better understand each core competency. The duties of a CHW may not require all of the skills and abilities listed with each core competency and some CHWs may have additional skills and abilities that are necessary to their specific job roles and responsibilities. These listed skills and abilities are based on research of the [Community Health Worker Core Consensus C3 project](#), and other states such as [Arizona](#), [Delaware](#), [Maine](#), [Massachusetts](#), [Michigan](#), [Missouri](#), [Nebraska](#), [South Carolina](#) and [Texas](#).

| Maryland Community Health Worker Core Competency | Select skills and abilities include, but are not limited to: |
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| 1. Advocacy and Community Capacity-Building Skills | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage individuals to identify, acquire and use available resources to meet their needs and goals • Provide information and support for individuals to advocate for themselves, participate in and over time become independent in, the acquisition of improved services • Use a variety of strategies to support individuals in meeting health goals • Advocate on behalf of individuals and communities, as appropriate, to assist individuals in attaining needed care or resources in a reasonable, and timely fashion • Build and maintain networks and collaborate with appropriate community partners in capacity-building activities • Participate in community forums and other venues to support advocating for needed or improved services |

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| <p>2. Effective Oral and Written Communication Skills</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand basic principles of verbal and non-verbal communication • Listen actively, communicate with empathy and gather information in a respectful manner • Identify and provide solutions to barriers to communication • Give information to individuals and groups in a clear and concise way • Document and maintain written records of activities and services • Collect data and provide feedback to health and human services agencies, funding sources and community-based organizations, as applicable |
| <p>3. Cultural Competency</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe different aspects of community and culture and how these can influence individuals' health beliefs and behavior • Employ techniques for interacting sensitively and effectively with individuals from diverse cultures and communities • Support the development of authentic, effective partnerships between individuals and providers by helping each to better understand the other's perspectives • Make accommodations to address communication needs accurately and sensitively in other languages • Advocate for and promote the use of culturally and linguistically appropriate services and resources within organizations with diverse colleagues and community partners • Advocate for individual self-determination and dignity • Understand how implicit bias affects individuals' understanding, actions and decisions in an unconscious manner when working with individuals |

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| <p>4. Understanding of Ethics and Confidentiality Issues</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply agency policies • Protect and maintain confidentiality • Apply basic concepts of liability • Recognize the implications of mandatory reporting • Observe ethical and legal standards (e.g., Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)) • Set and maintain boundaries and practice self-care |
| <p>5. Knowledge of Local Resources and System Navigation</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtain and share up-to-date eligibility requirements and other information about health insurance, public health programs, social services and additional resources to protect and promote health • Provide support for individuals to understand and use agency and institutional services • Make referrals and connections to community resources to help individuals and families meet basic social needs • Build individuals' ability to participate in making decisions about their care • Assist individuals to navigate services and resources in health and human services systems • Use and understand pertinent technology • Follow up to assure linkage to services and support individuals through interaction with health and human service systems to obtain needed services • Identify and access resources • Maintain a current resource inventory |

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| <p>6. Care Coordination Support Skills</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist with implementing health improvement plans, in cooperation with individuals and professional colleagues • Provide support for individuals to use provider instructions or advice, and convey individual challenges to providers, as applicable • Coordinate CHW activities with clinical and other community services • Assist in facilitating care transition, supporting the completion of referrals, providing or confirming appropriate follow-up and tracking care and referral outcomes • Comply with reporting, record keeping and documentation requirements • Work collaboratively as part of a care team • Identify and share appropriate information, referrals and other resources to help individuals, families, groups and organizations meet their needs |
| <p>7. Teaching Skills to Promote Healthy Behavior Change</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use methods that promote learning and positive behavior change, such as motivational interviewing • Use a variety of interactive teaching and coaching methods for different learning styles and ages • Facilitate group and/or individual discussions, and decision-making in ways that engage and motivate learners • Provide on-going support and follow-up to support healthy behavior change • Develop health improvement plans that recognize and build upon individual goals, strengths and current abilities to work on achieving their goals, in cooperation with individuals and professional colleagues • Employ patient engagement and motivational interviewing strategies |

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| <p>8. Outreach Methods and Strategies</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a range of outreach methods to engage individuals and groups in diverse settings • Initiate and sustain trusting relationships with individuals, families and social networks, such as meeting individuals in accessible places, making multiple efforts to engage individuals and/or partnering with community-based agencies to increase awareness of services • Establish and maintain cooperative relationships with community-based organizations and other resources to promote services, care, education and advocacy • Conduct outreach with attention to possible safety risks for self, clients and colleagues |
| <p>9. Understanding of Public Health Concepts and Health Literacy</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the basic principles of public and population health and work with partners in different sectors to achieve positive health outcomes • Use data and evidence-based practices in efforts to support individuals and communities in reaching their goals • Gather and share information about specific health topics most relevant to the populations and communities being served • Knowledge about social determinants of health and related disparities • Promote health equity and efforts to reduce health disparities through engagement with individuals, professional colleagues and community partners • Knowledge about healthy lifestyles and self-care • Work with individuals to improve their capacity to obtain, process and understand basic health information |