Peers and Community Health Workers (CHWs):
The Key Ingredient for Diabetes Prevention and Control Programs
Highlights from “Community Health Workers and Peer Specialists: Key Roles in Addressing Diabetes Control Before and During COVID-19 Health Pandemic.”

THANK YOU TO OUR “COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS AND PEERS’ ROLE IN DIABETES MANAGEMENT” WEBINAR PANELISTS:

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Senior Public Health Advisor with CDC/DDT

Phil Trotter
Prevention Workstream Chair with Diabetes Coalition of Mississippi

Lidiana Ramirez
CHW Interim Director of Programs with Proyecto Juan Diego

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For more information, visit csh.org.

As a HRSA funded National Training and Technical Assistance Partner (NTTAP), MHP Salud provides training and technical assistance to FQHCs and other organizations looking to build or enhance Community Health Worker (CHW) programs for 40 years. We serve communities by embracing the strengths and experiences of individuals and families, engaging them to achieve health and well-being. MHP Salud promotes the CHW profession nationally as a culturally appropriate strategy to improve health through CHW programs that provide peer health education, increase access to health resources and bring community members closer.

For more information, visit MHPSalud.org.
Prevalence of Diabetes in America and Communities of Color (*CDC 2022 Report*):

The CDC describes diabetes as a group of diseases characterized by high blood sugar and prediabetes as a condition in which the blood sugar may be above the normal range but not elevated enough to be diabetes.

+ More than **37 million people** in the United States, or **11.3% of the population**, have **diabetes**, and **96 million adults**, or **38% of the population**, have **prediabetes**.

+ Certain races/ethnicity, age, and income groups show a **higher prevalence of diabetes** which may be related to social risk factors and other health conditions.

**RACE/ETHNICITY:**

- **14.5%** Native American/Alaska Native
- **12.1%** Non-Hispanic Black
- **11.8%** Hispanic
- **7.4%** Non-Hispanic White

**INCOME, EDUCATION, AND AGE:**

- Income below the Federal poverty level had the highest prevalence of diabetes for both men, **13.7%** and women **14.4%**.

- People with **less education** were more likely to have been diagnosed with diabetes.

- Increased prevalence by age at **21.5%** for the population over the age of 65.
Community Health Workers/Peer Specialists Bring the Value of Lived Experience

A CHW is a trusted member of the community who empowers their peers through education and connections to health and social resources. CHWs can be known by other names such as Promotores de Salud, peer specialists, and/or outreach workers.

CHWs have **similar lived experiences** to their patients, which allows them to better understand community needs and connect them with the appropriate resources.

CHWs are **peers to the community** they serve and bring a skill set built on listening, empathy, advocacy, and education to support patients struggling with diabetes.

CHWs are **strong advocates** for individuals and the broader community for greater community-specific resources and training.

![Image of a woman in a chair, smiling, holding a clipboard, with another person in front of her.](CSH.org)
CHWs Serve a Bridge Role on Diabetes Care Team

CHWs/Peer Specialists can utilize their lived experience as a foundation to educate patients with personal experiences, adapt strategies to help patients deal with diabetes challenges, and express awareness and empathy towards the patients’ experiences and struggles.

Betsy Rodriguez, Senior Public Health Advisor with CDC/DDT, one of our CHW & Diabetes panel participants, shared critical points on the vital role of CHWs on the diabetes care team:

- **CHWs/Peer Specialists** are creative and are **vital members of the diabetes care team**; CHW professions are not just a service delivery model.

- Direct knowledge of the community, culture, and disease expertise enable CHWs to serve as a **bridge between people** with diabetes, the diabetes healthcare team, and the healthcare system. CHWs help support **culturally informed changes** to daily routines around healthy eating, being physically active, managing stress, and other self-care behaviors.

- **CHWs keep the community connected**, especially during the COVID-19 social distancing mandates, to educate and support patients to use technology for communications and health monitoring, i.e., using common messenger applications such as WhatsApp.

- CHW participation in care planning can provide **feedback to inform and adapt strategies and protocols** to reflect the environmental realities for patients.
Outreach and Education Strategies

CHWs provide the face of healthcare outside the clinic’s walls through common outreach and education strategies.

CHWs connect with the community at events and gatherings. During the pandemic, CHWs filled the gap when patients could not come into the clinics with technology training, prescription deliveries, and creative and safe activities.

Screening for social risk factors such as housing instability, food insecurity, and income deficiencies will inform the care plan.

CHWs provide targeted health education through diabetes-specific training and seminars, formal and informal one-to-one counseling and social support, translation services, support groups, and group activities.

CHWs/Peer Specialists lead health education classes to promote healthier lifestyles by educating their communities on dietary behaviors and exercise habits, two important behaviors having a significant impact on diabetes conditions.

Disease management support is another area where CHWs can inform patients on the importance of medication adherence, strategies to monitor and control their diabetes, monitoring blood glucose levels, and how best to watch for and manage diabetes complications.

CHWs often adapt the training modalities and locations to meet community needs, including one-to-one appointments or support group activities; virtual and telehealth platforms, in-person in the clinic or patient’s home, or at other community locations that can accommodate transportation or promote participation.
CHW/Peer Specialist Training

CHWs/Peer Specialists must be provided with continued support, opportunities for professional development, and diabetes-specific education. The COVID-19 health pandemic has brought many challenges for health centers across the nation, and CHWs/Peer Specialists have adapted and prospered. Through these efforts, they expanded their community connections and their role in the patient care team via telehealth. The continued support for CHW professional development and CHW well-being is vital to the CW workforce.

Webinar panelists Lidiana Ramirez (CHW Interim Director of Programs with Proyecto Juan Diego) and Phil Trotter (Prevention Workstream Chair with Diabetes Coalition of Mississippi) provided solid recommendations for training and support for CHWs/Peers.

- **Ongoing education** for CHWs is crucial to ensure up-to-date information for the community and equally important to prevent burnout for these vital community resources.

- **Peer support and training** for CHWs to help them build their interpersonal skills will help them to engage patiently and with empathy and better manage the work of teaching community members who may or may not be ready to make the necessary lifestyle changes needed to manage their diabetes.

- **Mentoring** is beneficial and important for CHW continuing education and training.
Summary

CHWs/Peer Specialists have many diabetes-specific functions and play a significant role in improving care for vulnerable populations. It is essential that they are recognized as the key ingredient in diabetes prevention and control programs. CHWs programs can greatly benefit health centers and the communities they serve.

MHP Salud has created a collection of resources for organizations interested in starting their own CHW program.

Recruiting and Hiring: Recruiting and Hiring the Voice of Lived Experience for CHWs

Voices from the Field: Recruiting and Hiring for Social Determinants of Health Screening