

Resource Guide for Health Centers:

Community Health Workers and COVID-19 Vaccine



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COVID-19 vaccines are a critical tool to help stop the spread of disease and protect our communities.¹ This is especially important as disparities in accessing COVID-19 education and resources continue to impact special and vulnerable communities.¹ As trusted members of their communities who empower their peers through education and connections to health and social resources, Community Health Workers/Promotores(as) de Salud play an important role in providing equitable COVID-19 vaccination education and resources.¹



In this Resource Guide, we demonstrate the valuable and crucial role Community Health Workers/Promotores(as) de Salud play in the vaccination efforts, and we provide examples, tools, and best practices to help health centers better integrate Community Health Workers/Promotores(as) into their COVID-19 vaccination efforts.

Community Health Workers and COVID-19

A **Community Health Worker (CHW)** is a trusted member of the community who empowers their peers through education and connections to health and social resources. They have proven to be successful at improving health outcomes for their communities because they have a deep understanding of the cultural norms of the people they serve. They do this by linking their neighbors to health care and social services, educating their peers about disease and injury prevention, working to make health services more accessible, and by mobilizing their communities to create positive change.^{1,2}

Many health centers have integrated CHWs into their COVID-19 efforts to educate, prevent the spread of the virus, help patients understand COVID-19 positive test results, and treat their communities.³ CHWs' unique insight allows them to tailor services to address issues specific to the communities they serve, such as providing culturally appropriate care and resources to patients.^{4,5} Naturally, CHWs have been crucial in addressing COVID-19 disparities; some examples include:

¹ <https://mhpsalud.org/our-chw-initiatives/community-health-workers/>

² <https://www.apha.org/apha-communities/member-sections/community-health-workers>

³ https://journals.lww.com/ambulatorycaremanagement/Fulltext/2020/10000/Insights_on_COVID_19_From_Community_Health_Worker.2.aspx

⁴ <https://nachw.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/CBWA-Advancing-CHW-Engagement-in-COVID-Updated-2021.pdf>

⁵ https://0d6c00fe-eae1-492b-8e7d-80acecb5a3c8.filesusr.com/ugd/7ec423_2b0893bcc93a422396c744be8c1d54d1.pdf

Providing culturally appropriate information on the coronavirus, including how it spreads and how to protect communities (e.g., educating patients in their preferred language(s); using simple language to share information)

Focusing on the specific needs of ethnic and racial groups, vulnerable populations and communities with prominent health problems (e.g., efforts to reach communities of color, patients living with chronic diseases or battling other illnesses)

Advocating for communities that are often overlooked because of economic or cultural differences (e.g., prioritizing migrant and seasonal agricultural workers)

Demonstrating how to practice social distancing and mask-wearing to encourage patients to remain healthy (e.g., using educational videos showing proper use of mask and why it should be worn)

Connecting communities to COVID-19 testing clinics and other resources (e.g., mobile testing clinics or providing personal protective equipment)^{1,1}

As health centers expand community vaccination efforts against COVID-19, CHWs have an important role to play.



CHWs Are Crucial to COVID-19 Vaccination Efforts

CHWs are well positioned to provide information, resources, and support related to the **COVID-19 vaccine**, especially for vulnerable communities. In addition to the roles and examples highlighted earlier, CHWs are advancing important conversations, facilitating access to COVID-19 vaccines, and educating vulnerable communities on the importance of receiving the vaccine.

In the following case studies, we highlight how health centers are maximizing their CHWs to address gaps and disparities related to the COVID-19 vaccine. Additionally, special and vulnerable communities, such as Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Workers (MSAWs), are discussed throughout the examples to provide more resources for health centers serving these communities.

Brockton Neighborhood Health Center

Brockton Neighborhood Health Center (BNHC) is a multi-cultural community health center and a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC), located in Brockton, Massachusetts.¹

CHWs have been crucial in expanding BNHC's vaccine offerings for vulnerable communities. These CHWs connect patients to upcoming COVID-19 vaccination clinics, through community outreach and calling patients. **To address additional health disparities impacting their communities, CHWs conduct social determinants of health (SDOH) screening during COVID-19 vaccination clinics,** gathering information on food insecurity, mental health, and housing.

To address rising mental health needs among their patients, CHWs were trained on mental health screening and follow-up to identify anxiety and depression among patients and provide resources to cope and treat their mental health needs. Additionally, CHWs facilitated self-care practices to address anxieties related to COVID-19 exposure – which is very common among essential workers, like migrant farmworkers – and provide tips on making the most of limited Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for patients working in essential roles.

Community Health and Social Services Center

Community Health and Social Services (CHASS) Center is a FQHC located in Southwest Detroit, Michigan, that provides comprehensive, accessible and affordable quality primary health care and support services to all residents of the community, with special emphasis on the underserved African American and Latino population.¹ Over the past year, CHASS Center has *shifted* how their CHWs support patients to address the high need for COVID-19 education, testing, vaccinations, and other related resources.

» Quote

“We've been using Community health workers in various ways, like as [SDOH] screeners so they were screening patients and also reaching out to high-risk patients.”

– **Maria Cancel**, LMHC, Counselor, BNHC

» Quote

“It's not just about the testing or the vaccination but also about follow-up, which is not so much immediate. It's more long-term, connecting patients with someone who is going to be there for them; they have a Community Health Worker here [at CHASS Center] to contact and reach.”

– **Melissa Garcia**, MPH, CLS, CHW, Clinic Manager, CHASS Center

Initially, CHWs were responsible for facilitating COVID-19 testing registration, including providing patient education on test results and proper use of PPE. Additionally, CHASS Center engaged CHWs in food and PPE distribution efforts, allowing them to ensure the community receives these resources.

As CHASS Center transitioned from only offering COVID-19 testing to including COVID-19 vaccination efforts, CHWs remained crucial. CHWs at this FQHC, have been engaged in COVID-19 test registration, follow-up (e.g., for 2-dose vaccines or missed appointments), and reducing vaccine hesitancy among their local Latino communities.

Additionally, CHASS Center utilized their *phone system* to provide virtual care when possible. **CHWs were also engaged in this outreach by remaining connected to patients virtually** to ensure they still attended appointments, received COVID-19 testing and/or vaccines, and answered questions about COVID-19 spread, risk, and treatment.

CHASS Center was initially hesitant to incorporate CHWs in COVID-19 efforts since their previous work was focused on chronic disease management, like diabetes and hypertension. However, the clinic “found a new niche” for their CHWs outside existing roles in the clinic, allowing them to maximize the unique role CHWs bring to the table. CHASS Center is **now integrating CHWs to address social determinants of health**, another growing space for CHWs.^{6,7}

Northeast Valley Health Corporation

Northeast Valley Health Corporation (NEVHC) located in San Fernando, California, has 14 health centers and 13 Women, Infants and Children (WIC) sites throughout San Fernando and Santa Clarita Valleys. Given its proximity to Los Angeles, NEVHC serves a large Latino population, providing special programming for homelessness, WIC, HIV, and school-based care.¹

NEVHC has engaged their CHWs (referred as Patient Navigators)¹ in COVID-19 prevention and education (e.g., proper use of PPE and social distancing), registration and check-in for COVID-19 testing and vaccinations, and in facilitating the clinic’s food drive.

➤ Quote

“We have Patient Navigators who help patients by addressing their social needs. For example, Navigators help patients find a place where they can self-isolate or quarantine [due to COVID-19 positive results], or they help patients understand their insurance coverage, so they know where to receive care.”

- Francisco Romero, MS, Program Manager, NEVHC

CHWs have also been integrated into their clinical care team, allowing CHWs to work alongside the nursing staff. As nurses conduct COVID-19 testing and administer vaccines, CHWs provide patient follow-up and education to ensure patients are connected to COVID-19 information, resources, and care, including addressing misconceptions and hesitancy. Given their experience educating patients on the

⁶ <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMp2022641>

⁷ <https://mhpsalud.org/portfolio/chws-social-determinants-of-health/>

influenza vaccine, **CHWs have been crucial in providing similar support related to misconceptions about the COVID-19 vaccine**; this has been especially important for patients with language and literacy barriers.

NEVHC addressed language barriers by ramping up training for their CHWs, including helping CHWs better translate and disseminate COVID-19 information to reflect patients' language and literacy barriers. Additionally, **to address barriers faced by older patients, CHWs help facilitate transportation services to the clinic** (e.g., Uber vouchers).

HealthLinc

HealthLinc is a FQHC with 14 clinics throughout northern Indiana, including a mobile unit that provides medical and dental services in vulnerable communities, and Mobile Integrated Response Teams (MIRT) addressing opioid abuse.¹

CHWs at HealthLinc have been engaged in COVID-19 efforts by addressing patients' social determinants of health (SDOH). **HealthLinc has focused on patients' behavioral health needs and technology access**, both crucial factors that have *exacerbated* COVID-19-related disparities.

➤ Quote

“CHWs are able to talk to [our] population about signs and symptoms of COVID-19, how to get tested, community education, and mental health issues [related to COVID-19 pandemic].”

– Mimi Gardner, MA, Chief Behavioral Health Officer, HealthLinc

HealthLinc also **integrated their CHWs into their clinical care team, allowing them to work with providers and address SDOH concerns related to COVID-19**. They also provided community referrals including referrals to food banks, food coupons, and followed-up to ensure patients were getting the food assistance they needed. Additionally, **CHWs were trained to screen their patients that are 65 years and older and identify gaps** in technology access, transportation, and mental health. CHWs have helped older patients download Zoom applications on their cellphones, provided donated computers to patients without smartphones, and ensured older patients were prioritized for initial vaccination appointments.



Additional Resources

The following free resources are aimed at helping health centers integrate CHWs into their COVID-19 efforts.

➤ CDC's COVID-19 Resources for CHWs

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has an extensive resource page for CHWs engaged in COVID-19 education, prevention, testing, and vaccination efforts. Key resources include:

- **Personal Protection and Safety** resources to keep CHWs in the field safe.
- **Telehealth and In-person Risk Assessment Tools** for CHWs to enhance patient engagement.
- **Self-care and Mental Health Resources** for CHWs and their patients.
- **Communication Tools**, including posters, handouts, and graphics for CHWs to share with patients.
- **Policies and Safety Procedures** for health centers to integrate CHWs safely and appropriately into their COVID-19 efforts.
- **Training Resources for CHWs**, including recorded webinars and modules.

For more information, visit the CDC's *Resources for Community Health Workers, Community Health Representatives, and Promotores de la Salud* page [here](#).

➤ National Association of Community Health Workers' National COVID-19 Resiliency Network

National Association of Community Health Workers (NACHW) has CHW-specific resources that include tools and studies to help CHWs and health centers improve the CHW role to address COVID-19 disparities. Key resources include:

- **Advancing CHW Engagement in COVID-19 Response Strategies** provides practical guidance to operationalize CHW engagement at the local, state, and national level.
- **COVID-19 Digital Classroom** that provides CHW resources and training via video animations to help reinforce key concepts. These animations are available in Arabic, French, Hindi, Portuguese, Spanish, and Swahili.
- **Contact Tracing Training** resources, videos, and modules that are offered in English, Spanish, French, Arabic, and Lingala.

For more information, visit NACHW's *National COVID-19 Resiliency Network Resource* page [here](#).

MHP Salud's COVID-19 Directory for CHWs

MHP Salud hosts an online directory focused on CHWs and COVID-19 interventions for Latino and farmworker communities. Here you will find information from various sources, including resources in Spanish. Key resources include:



- **MHP Salud COVID-19 Bilingual Resources**, including COVID-19 Safety Guide, How to Properly Use a Face Covering, and CHWs and COVID-19. Most resources include visuals to help CHWs better understand and communicate information to their communities.
- **COVID-19 and CHWs Virtual Technical Assistance Resources**, including recordings and slide presentations on various COVID-19 related topics. These sessions include speakers from national Area Health Education Centers (AHECs), Primary Care Associations (PCAs), FQHCs, and the CDC.
- **COVID-19 Infographics/Visual Aides** to help CHWs educate their communities, including specific resources for migrant farmworkers.
- **Blogs and Educational Tools** by MHP Salud and other national organizations to help CHWs further learn about emerging CHW practices related to COVID-19. This includes videos and bilingual materials.

*For more information, visit the MHP Salud's **COVID-19 and CHW Directory** page [here](#).*

Special Thanks

We want to recognize and thank the following health centers for providing best practices, challenges, and resources they have implemented to ensure their CHWs are addressing critical COVID-19-related disparities:

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- Community Health and Social Services (CHASS) Center
- Northeast Valley Health Corporation (NEVHC)
- HealthLinc



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