

Title: Community Health Workers and Their Value to Social Work

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Abstract

Community health workers (CHWs) play a vital and unique role in linking diverse and underserved populations to health and social service systems. Despite their effectiveness, as documented by empirical studies across various disciplines including public health, nursing, and biomedicine, the value and potential role of CHWs in the social work practice and research literature has been largely absent. Thus, this article introduces social workers to CHWs, their role in promoting culturally appropriate practice, and their utility in collaboration with social workers in community settings. This integrative review also discusses current challenges identified by the CHW literature, including potential barriers to the expansion of CHW programs, as well as issues of training, certification, and sustainability. The review also discusses the close alignment of CHWs with social work values and principles of social justice, suggesting opportunities for enhanced social work practice and research.

Key words: community health worker; community organizing; health disparities; policy; racial–ethnic groups.

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