

Advancing Community Health Workers through Work-based Learning: Jobs to Careers

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INTRODUCTION—Despite evidence that community health workers (CHWs) improve access and health outcomes for underserved populations, optimal use of CHWs in health care settings remains limited due to nonstandard preparation, unclear job descriptions, and inadequate career paths. This presentation examines challenges, facilitators, and effects of investing in CHWs in *Jobs to Careers: Transforming the Frontlines of Health Care Initiative*, a grant-funded program aimed at educating and advancing CHWs using partnerships between employers and community colleges.

METHODS—Data from the evaluation of 5 Community Health Centers included: (1) semi-structured interviews and focus groups with CEOs, HR staff, and workers; (2) pre- and post-training surveys of participants and controls; and (3) a web-based database tracking participant progress.

RESULTS—Employers supported workers' formal education (e.g., college credit, certification), training (e.g., continuing education), and career advancement (e.g., promotions, raises). Workers experienced increased self-confidence, organizational validation; upgraded pay and promotions, and more responsibility and autonomy. Organizations reported improved recruitment and retention, increased workforce morale and organizational commitment, and a more knowledgeable and skilled workforce. Critical factors in achieving successful outcomes included: (1) structural supports (tuition assistance and educational release time); (2) collaborations with educational institutions and community organizations; (3) formal support for barrier reduction (transportation, childcare, stress management); (4) basic skills assessment and remediation; (5) supportive supervision; and (6) emphasis on problem based and experiential learning.

CONCLUSION—Systematically enhancing the education and career advancement of CHWs can be successfully implemented in community health workplaces and can benefit both workers and employers.

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Principles of Work Based Learning

1. Curriculum embedded in the work process
2. Learning embedded in the work process
3. Assessment embedded in the work process
4. Coworker and instructor involvement
5. Formal career ladders
6. Meaningful rewards
7. Employer systems change
8. Educational institution systems change

<i>Site</i>	<i>Organization Type</i>	<i>Job Titles of Targeted Workers</i>	<i># Participants</i>	<i>Program Description</i>	<i>Targeted Outcomes</i>
Chinle Service Unit, Arizona	Federal, Indian Health Service	Health Technician (in Div of Public Health)	18	Participating workers completed online modules developed collaboratively by Chinle staff and Northern Arizona University (NAU) designed to help workers acquire skills in the community health and health promotion field.	Skill Development; Promotion
Wai'anae Coast Comp Health Center, Hawaii	Sec 330 Community Health Center	Medical Assistants, Medical Receptionists	70	The training program involved workers taking 5 for-credit classes through Leeward Community College (LCC) and 5 non-credit continuing education classes related to medical office procedures and technology.	Certificate of completion in Admin Support in Health from LCC; 14 college credits towards an Assoc .degree in Business Technology at LCC; Wage increases
East Boston Neighborhood Health Center, Mass	Sec 330 Community Health Center	Medical Assistants	52	Participating workers underwent training to become Certified Auxiliary Interpreters (CAI). The training consisted of two core courses – Med Interpretation and Med Terminology - offered by Bunker Hill Comm College (BHCC) & 16 hours of job shadowing.	3 hours of college credit for each course; Wage Increases
Norton Sound Health Corp, Alaska	Native-Alaskan owned health corporation	Village-based counselors, Subst abuse counselor, case managers	8	Participating workers completed four courses through University of Alaska, Fairbanks (UAF) designed to equip workers with the skills and knowledge necessary to be effective in behavioral health. The courses were Standards of Practice, Counseling, Ethics, and Case Management.	12-15 credits towards an Associate's Degree in Human Services at UAF; Occupational endorsement certificate as a Behavioral Health Aide I.
Charles B. Wang Community Health Center, New York	Sec 330 Community Health Center	Med assistants, Pt service Reps, & Family health workers	50	Workers received training in Medical Administrative Assistance. The training involved 63 hours of classroom training and 37 hours of on the job learning activities. Curriculum topics include medical terminology, customer service, medical office procedures, and communication.	Medical Administrative Assistant certificate from the City College of New York; Wage Increase; Eligible to take an exam to become nationally certified Medical Administrative Assistants

For more information:

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Websites < <http://jobs2careers.org/>>; < <http://www.aging.unc.edu/programs/j2c/index.html>>