IDPH
Illinois Department of Public Health

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

For Community Health Workers



Illinois Public Health Association
IPHA

Community Health Workers
Help. Guide. Thrive.

Learn more about CHW certification and next steps:
HELPGUIDETHRIVE.ORG

What is a Community Health Worker (CHW)?

Community Health Worker, or "**CHW**," means a frontline public health worker who is a trusted member of, or has deep knowledge of, the community served. This trusting relationship enables the Community Health Worker to serve as **a liaison between health and human services and the community, helping facilitate access to services** and improve the quality and cultural competence of service delivery.

What can CHWs do day-to-day?

CHWs have different roles and responsibilities depending on the organization and community. A Community Health Worker also builds individual and community capacity by increasing health knowledge and self-sufficiency through a range of activities, including outreach, community education, informal counseling, social support, and advocacy.

What is commonly needed to become a CHW?

What matters most is:

- Lived or shared community experience
- Strong communication and listening skills
- A desire to help others
- Trust within the community

Who makes a good CHW?

You might make a good CHW if you:

- Are passionate about helping your community
- Are someone people trust and turn to for help
- Understand local cultures, languages, or experiences
- Enjoy connecting people to resources and information

Where do CHWs work?

CHWs work in many settings, including:

- Community-based and nonprofit organizations
- Health departments
- Clinics and hospitals
- Schools and social service agencies
- Faith-based and neighborhood organizations
- Court systems

Is this a paid job?

- **Yes**, while volunteer opportunities exist, most CHW roles are paid positions. Additionally, becoming certified as a CHW would make some of the services you offer eligible for Medicaid and Medicare reimbursement

What can I expect from CHW certification?

Certification is expected to:

- Recognize CHWs' skills and experience
- Support training and career pathways
- Strengthen the CHW workforce statewide

Do I need a college degree or medical training to be a CHW?

- **No. CHWs do not need a college degree or clinical background. What matters most is:**
- Lived or shared community experience
- Strong comunication and listening skills
- A desire to help others
- Trust within the community

Illinois has established pathways for individuals to obtain Community Health Worker (CHW) certification, including work experience, completion of an approved training program, equivalent prior training, and reciprocity for certifications earned in other states. Experienced CHWs may qualify through a grandparenting provision with at least 2,500 hours of documented experience, a refresher course, and a professional recommendation, while other pathways recognize approved training, qualifying prior education and field experience, or equivalent out-of-state certification.

Do I need to be certified to become a CHW right now?

- **No.** CHW certification is not currently required in Illinois. You can still pursue CHW roles, training, and experience without being certified. However, state CHW certification is connected to reimbursement, so organizations may need certified CHWs in order to bill for certain services as certification becomes available.

Does certification cost money?

- Details about financial costs for certification vary by organization.

How do I learn more or get started?

- Visit HelpGuideThrive.org for more information.

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