

Initial Evaluation of Community Health Worker Programs in Austin, Texas

Asian American Resource Center Nonprofit

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Introduction

There has been ample demonstration of the effectiveness of Community Health Workers in recent years. In evaluating Community Health Worker (CHW) programs in Austin, 8 entities were examined. Seven interviews were conducted with existing programs and one was researched online.

State-certified CHW training organizations

1. PromoSalud (Latino Healthcare Forum)
2. Promotora/Community Health Workers of Travis County
3. El Buen Samaritano Episcopal Mission
4. Texas A&M Health Science Center – online
5. Cardea Services

Non-State-certified CHW organizations

6. Austin/Travis County Health & Human Services Department (HHSD)
7. Seton Total Health

Non- CHW organization that provides related services to Asian Americans

8. Asian Family Support Services of Austin

Background on State-certified CHW Training Programs

State certified training must include a minimum 160 hour curriculum. Each organization must have their curriculum approved by the State of Texas in order to certify CHWs. These individuals may have different job titles: Community Worker, Health Navigator, Health Ambassador, Promotora, Health Promoter, etc. Individuals can also apply for certification directly from the state if they have 1,000 hours of related experience in these competencies.

There are many advantages to Health Ambassadors or Navigators becoming state-certified CHWs. The training helps the individual become grounded in 8 core competency areas: **Communication, Interpersonal skills, Service coordination, Capacity-building, Advocacy, Teaching, Organization, and Health issues.** Training is also flexible, individualized and designed to meet community needs.

State Certified CHW Training Programs

PromoSalud (Latino Healthcare Forum)

Length

251 hours (state requires 160 hours)

Training Cost

Temporarily grant-funded, so no cost to the student at this time

Requirements

Bilingual, familiar with the community, read English at 3rd grade level, and some competency in technology (email and social media).

Funding

Temporary grant funding for CHWs placed through Lone Star Circle of Care and Sendero

Training

Training is based on ESL learning principles using visuals whenever possible and includes ACA enrollment training. Students are required to do additional research and documentation of community resources on their own.

Program details

CHWs are lay workers connecting clients with medical professionals, counseling and interpreting. CHWs have good communication skills to advocate for clients without alienating

providers. They help clients identify gaps and navigate the system: medication management/compliance, education, basic needs, social services, etc.

Some CHWs demonstrate improved client-outcomes working with Lone Star Circle of Care, but lack 3rd party reimbursement for long term stability. Sendero, an HMO, uses CHWs for home care visits and may hire them permanently. Latino Healthcare Forum (LHF) has hired some graduates and plan to hire 3 more for the Rundberg area.

The initial class included Spanish only speakers, but they were unable to obtain placement, so LHF now requires some knowledge of English to participate in the program. Each student goes through a process to develop a resource list and binder. A case management tool was developed for CHWs at Lone Star since they were carrying a caseload of roughly 200 clients.

Ideas for Structuring CHW Programs in the Asian American community

- English and medical terminology can be challenging
- Navigators from the community could have shared history, but different dialects can be a challenge
- Mobile apps could help with translations
- Translated resource and referral guides would be helpful

Promotora/Community Health Workers of Travis County

Length

160 hours

Training Cost

\$600/person

Requirements

Reading, writing and *a caring heart*. English is not required.

Funding

Limited 1115 Medicaid Waiver program funding from Community Care and HHSD may be ending. CHW services are often not reimbursed by insurance or Medicaid

Training

An authorized site for the Texas A&M Colonias Program. Training is provided annually every fall (on Saturdays), with focus on diabetes and pre-natal care. Of 4 trainings thus far, 2 were funded by Texas Medical Foundation (TMF) and Catholic Diocese of Austin. Training includes role playing, pre-test and post-test for competency, and attendance at health conferences.

Program details

Director Crescencia Alvarado was on the Advisory Committee for developing the Department of State Health Services (DSHS) Community Health Worker (CHW) training program requirements in 1999.

Promotora should be someone *“respected in the same community he/she represents, and has a vision to invest in the community in order to have a better place to live.”*

CHW placement examples include Parent Support Specialists at Schools, Navigators or translators at Seton, 5 at Community Care Clinics, 4 at the HHSD Diabetes program. Many CHWs are volunteers at schools or apartments and their success depends largely upon personal initiative. Idea for improvement include simultaneous English/Spanish training and Group Learning sessions.

Ideas for Structuring CHW Programs in the Asian American community

- ESL for CHWs or Navigators with limited English skills
- Computer skills – CHWs should be familiar with using internet and social media
- Use existing referral resources like AuntBertha.com

El Buen Samaritano Episcopal Mission

Length

160 hours/ 6 months (July – December)

20 hours required for annual re-certification, at least 10 CEU and rest can be community participation.

Training Cost

\$300/person. Volunteers are provided scholarships through El Buen’s various funders.

Requirements

No education or language requirement.

Funding

Began as a volunteer program, but program is more effective and sustainable with employees paid at minimum \$13.50/hr.

Training

The training is only offered in Spanish. Training has also been conducted with a group of Seton nurses. The curriculum was developed by a San Antonio doctor who also helped El Buen obtain state certification.

Program details

CHWs are advocates, liaisons, and an information/referral resource to entities including Literacy Coalition, 2-1-1, and Aunt Bertha. Screening is an informal conversation and orientation to assure local focus and connection to program design.

Target populations are in 78744, 78716, Rundberg area and Round Rock.

Currently 2 CHWs function as Navigators at the El Buen clinics, working with clients to identify individual needs, understand medical directives/protocol, make appointments and provide other case management services.

Four other CHWs provide training workshops and community outreach in their specialty: chronic disease management, screening, health equity, advocacy.

There is increased awareness and appreciation for Promotores/CHWs. (State is asking Blue Cross to hire CHWs) Program is promoted at health fairs, radio/TV community service ads, regular radio health programs.

Recent training updates include diabetes management and Zika virus.

Ideas for Structuring CHW Programs in the Asian American community

Recommend developing promotional materials for Asian American populations and work through churches and temples

Texas A&M Health Science Center – online:

<http://nchwtc.tamhsc.edu/chwpromotora-certification-course-overview/>

Length

160 hours (24 weeks)

Cost

\$600

\$1,000 (to become certified CHW trainer)

Program details

Basic training in 8 core competencies available on-line for self-study. This is a good way for someone who is already employed to obtain a certification for job enhancement or additional job opportunities.

Cardea Services

The CHW training curriculum at Cardea was approved by the state 2-3 years ago and focused on Border Health, Cultural Competency and Family Planning. They have yet to conduct the training. They have one CHW on staff and one at the Migrant Clinician's Network.

Non-State-certified CHW organizations

Austin/Travis County Health & Human Services Department (HHSD)

Austin/Travis County HHSD has 2 programs using Community Health Workers as temporary part-time employees without benefits: Diabetes and Maternal Infant Outreach (MIOP). Both programs have 1115 Medicaid Waiver Innovation funding, which is being phased out. Both programs would like to convert these positions to regular employees.

- The Diabetes program is singularly focused on diabetes education in the African American and Hispanic communities.
 - The program uses 2 part time CHWs and 2 subcontracts
 - CHWs are key to getting people into classes and retention
 - The Manager feels having a single focus on diabetes is very important.
- The Maternal Infant Outreach (MIOP) works with clients in the maternal health program and the CHWs were recruited through that program and word-of-mouth. The Manager, Cynthia Washington, is a state certified CHW trainer and can work with individuals to obtain state certification.
 - Program began 3 years ago with 12 CHWs and currently have 5
 - They are able to use the A.K. Black facility in East Austin as a base of operations and location for flyers and referrals.
 - CHWs typically have a caseload of 20 clients, working with 2-3 clients for pre-natal visits, then home visits and phone calls. Each client must have at least two contacts per month
 - The CHW must have a good interactive working relationship with the physician, who values the CHW recommendations.
 - Clients often need referrals to social safety net services and the CHW must be aware of the resources and the resource limitations.
 - Subsidized housing set asides would be very helpful.
 - There also needs to be a support system for the CHWs to deal with their stress and frustrations

Seton Total Health

CHWs work as part of a team in the Emergency Department at Seton Brackenridge Hospital. The job title for the CHW is “Health Promoter” and it is part of a team approach to reduce ER visits and transition clients to Outpatient services. In addition to the Health Promoter, the team includes the Medical Provider, a Nurse Navigator, Dietician, and Social Worker.

- Clients are poor, homeless or uninsured. The client must be a Travis County resident and have at least 1 chronic illness and 1 ER visit.
- Health Promoter identifies patient needs, linkage to services, insurance enrollment, coordination of benefits, medical protocol/compliance
- Each Health Promoter has a caseload of 100+ clients
- Health Promoters must obtain a CHW certification on their own and at their own expense. Seton has generous offerings of CEU’s for certification renewal
- This program is also funded through an 1115 Medicaid Waiver at risk of running out.
- It appears that some insurers like United Healthcare are considering hiring CHWs in the near future.

There are other programs within the Seton system which also use CHWs. The above is just one example.

Non- CHW organization that provides related services to Asian Americans

Asian Family Support Services of Austin (AFSSA)

Asian Family Support Services of Austin (AFSSA) is a nonprofit organization that provides assistance to Asian and other immigrant families dealing with domestic violence, sexual assault and trafficking. The Client Services Director at AFSSA was interviewed and provided valuable insight about specific challenges faced by Asian Americans in obtaining safety net services.

Although AFFSA does not have certified CHWs on staff, they have Client Services staff who often serve similar roles since no other organization focuses on primarily serving Asian Americans in Austin. However, since their mission is focused on domestic violence and sexual assault victims, their ability to provide health navigation services for non-clients is limited to basic referrals.

AFSSA is particularly focused on advocacy and language access. All of their community outreach staff, including volunteers, go through formal interpreter training. They use a vendor, Pacific Interpreters, for telephonic interpretation and have a 24-hour hotline to provide immediate assistance. The languages most in demand are Burmese, Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean and Arabic.

Summary

In reviewing existing CHW programs in Austin, the following programs stand out: **PromoSalud** (Latino Healthcare Forum) and **Promotora**/Community Health Workers of Travis County).

The two programs are very similar in their approach, with PromoSalud focused on navigating the healthcare system and Promotora focused on diabetes and pre-natal care. PromoSalud's use of ESL teaching approach and focus on client navigation may be helpful and relevant in structuring such a program for the Asian American community.

As for the other three State-certified programs, Cardea has no track record at this time. Texas A&M's on-line training is not appropriate at this stage since a hands-on approach is preferable in starting a new program. Lastly, El Buen Samaritano program is in Spanish only so not directly applicable for the Asian American community.

Timing and cost are major factors to consider in implementing a program targeting Asian American populations as well as tackling diverse languages and gaining trust in the community. Flexible and interactive resource guides in Asian languages would be helpful. Relationships with health care providers will be a key to success to ensure program growth and sustainability.