

“Nos apoyamos mutuamente”: Strategies to Supporting Community Health Workers Addressing the Emergency and Chronic Needs of Latinx Families

Background:

Community health workers (CHWs) serving Latinx immigrant communities during COVID-19 helped bridge resource gaps, particularly for uninsured, undocumented, and non-English-speaking immigrants, by providing critical support for basic needs, managing client anxieties, and navigating testing and virtual schooling requirements. They faced increased demands, infection risks, and personal challenges. Employers implemented safety protocols, flexible policies, and career development to support CHWs and maintain service continuity. Through partnerships with local agencies, CHWs addressed the essential needs of Latinx families, highlighting the importance of culturally relevant, community-based health workers in reducing health disparities during crises.

Methods:

Data Collection:

- Community health workers (CHWs) with relevant experience during the COVID-19 pandemic were recruited through a single organization.
- Semi-structured interviews were conducted to allow flexibility in responses while focusing on specific aspects of CHWs' experiences, roles, and challenges.
- Each interview was recorded with participant consent and transcribed verbatim for accuracy.

Analysis:

- A coding framework was developed to identify themes related to CHWs' experiences, roles, and community impact.
- Thematic analysis was applied to identify patterns across the data, focusing on recurring themes and unique insights. An iterative process was used to refine codes and enhance thematic clarity, with multiple rounds of review.
- Qualitative analysis software was facilitated using MAXQDA for coding and data retrieval.

Themes & Implications

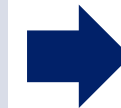
CHW Employment Responsibilities

- Provide in-person support (mental health, domestic violence, financial/legal resources, referrals).
- Offer culturally and linguistically relevant services.
- Leverage partnerships for mixed-status families excluded from COVID relief benefits.



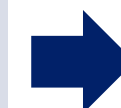
Challenges Faced by CHWs

- Fear of COVID-19 transmission.
- Increased workload.
- Childcare needs.
- Need for motivation and support.



Organization Response

- Implemented COVID-19 safety protocols.
- Hired additional culturally relevant staff.
- Adopted flexible work policies.
- Shifted from hierarchical culture to offer career development.



Impact on CHWs

- Felt safer at work.
- Reduced stress, especially for those with children.
- Increased social support and workplace social capital.
- Greater empowerment and career growth opportunities.

Findings:

- Community health workers (CHWs) are viewed as essential connectors between healthcare systems and underserved communities, playing a crucial role in improving health outcomes and access to care.
- CHWs reported facing various challenges, including limited funding, lack of professional recognition, and insufficient training opportunities.
- CHWs motivation and resiliency came from cultural connectedness, intentional staffed centered work-place policies, and strategic community partnerships.

Discussion:

A critical role of CHWs is providing culturally tailored support to vulnerable communities, as shown by their efforts during COVID-19 to bridge resource gaps and deliver essential services to underserved Latinx immigrant populations. Their work underscores the importance of embedding CHWs in public health strategies to reduce health disparities, especially in times of crisis.

Key Takeaway

This study was done to examine the impact of community health workers in addressing healthcare access barriers for immigrant communities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Citation:

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