

Community Health Workers in Vermont

Experiences Snapshot: Workplace Benefits and Challenges

March 2022

Introduction

This brief provides a summary of key data points about the experiences of community health workers (CHWs) derived from a May 2021 survey¹ of 128 CHWs and 33 CHW employers from across Vermont. The survey, conducted by the Vermont Department of Health (VDH), in collaboration with the Vermont CHW Steering Committee, represents an ongoing effort by VDH to collect information about the roles, scope of work, skills, and training of the current CHW workforce in the state.

Benefits of having CHWs at organizations

From the perspective of their employers, CHWs bring the following benefits to their organizations:

Improved health outcomes for clients (89%)

Improved access to care (89%)

Improved health for minority and underserved populations (85%)

Increased success reaching hard-to-reach target populations (81%)

Reduced healthcare costs for clients (70%)

Reduced healthcare costs for organizations (56%)

Increased medication and treatment regimen adherence for clients (41%)

Highlights

Top 3 Benefits of CHWs



Improved health outcomes for clients



Improved access to care



Improved health for minority and underserved populations

Experience of CHWs

86% feel they are a valued team member

53% feel they are utilized to their full potential

Challenges CHWs face

Lack of funding

Lack of resources and training

Low compensation

Burnout

Not being valued or recognized

Source: 2021 Vermont Community Health Worker Survey

Learn more at healthvermont.gov/CHWs

CHW Experiences

CHWs and CHW employers commented on the rewarding nature of their work and the value they bring to their organizations and communities.



“What CHWs do are so many of the intangibles, a list too long to list, but it’s the *in-between stuff* that likely wouldn’t be on a report, that make *a huge difference for children and families.*”

-CHW employer

“I love being a CHW! It is truly the perfect position for me, I have a love of education and want to *help as many members of our community as possible.* My hope is to keep *expanding our resources* and push the envelope to *reach every individual.*”

-CHW

“I have been able to be a *point person* for someone who wasn’t sure what supports they were looking for and provide them a person and space to *talk through their concerns and navigate what resources are out there.*”

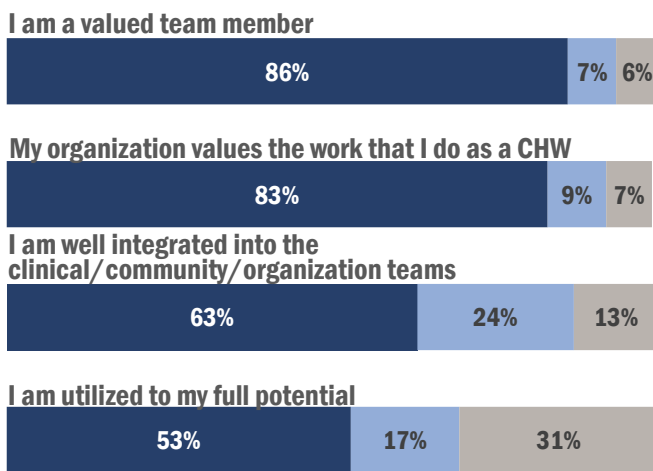
-CHW



Experiences of CHWs at their organizations

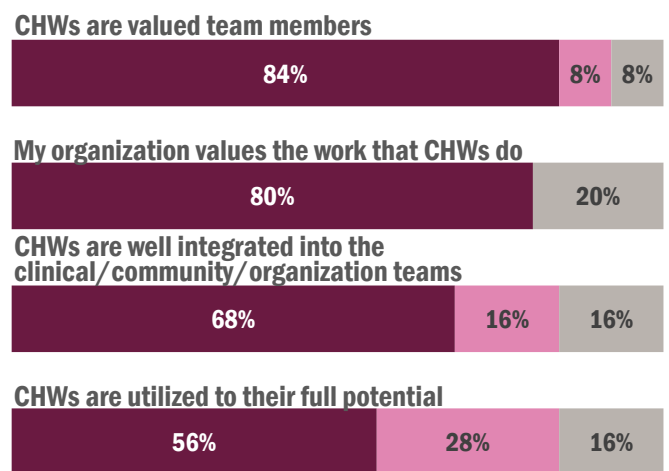
CHWs and CHW-employers reported on how the CHWs are valued, integrated, and utilized at their organizations.

Responses from CHWs:



■ Agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Disagree

Responses from CHW employers:



■ Agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Disagree

CHW Experiences

Challenges that CHWs Face

Respondents listed numerous challenges that CHWs face. Challenges reported included **lack of funding for the field, lack of resources and training, low compensation, burnout, and not being valued or recognized.**

“We are **under-supported/exploited by the system at large** and the weight of the work we are tasked with, which includes being **given low pay/benefits, having a lack of necessary resources** [...] as well as **disproportionately burdened by the kind of student debt** often required to get the degrees/licenses necessary to be able to provide the care those we serve deserve. All of this leads to massive rates of **burnout**, which is particularly heavy given how our field is made up by the vast majority of people from **marginalized/exploited groups.**”

-CHW

“At the organizational and state levels there is **no understanding of the value** of these workers and **no commitment or funding allocated** to these best practice models, always relying on federal funding or grants to do the work.”

-CHW employer

“This is a rewarding field but the **instability of grant funding, and positions resulting**, is a problem. It can take years for relationship building to manifest into something and it's imperative that we have CHW's to help bridge gaps and help foster capacity for healthier VT communities.”

-CHW

Next Steps

The Vermont Community Health Worker Steering Committee directs efforts to accomplish sustainable change in promoting and supporting the work of Community Health Workers in Vermont. The committee plans to conduct ongoing surveys to collect critical information to inform the statewide priorities to recognize and advance the work of Community Health Workers in Vermont.

For more information: Visit [Healthvermont.gov/CHWS](https://healthvermont.gov/CHWS) or contact Jennifer Woolard, jennifer.woolard@vermont.gov



ⁱ **A note about survey methods and respondents:** Data for this brief was gathered from a web-based survey (administered 05/03/2021–05/28/2021) of a convenience sample of CHWs and CHW employers across Vermont. A total of 145 CHWs and 33 CHW employers responded to the survey. Upon analysis, VDH and PDA excluded 17 participants as they did not appear to be CHWs. This was the second year VDH gathered information via surveys about CHW professionals and organizations that engage CHWs. It is not clear the extent to which the responses are representative of all CHWs or all organizations that engage CHWs in Vermont.

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