

A Community Health Worker (CHW) is a frontline public health worker who is a trusted member of and/or has an unusually close understanding of the community she or he serves. This trusting relationship enables the CHW to serve as a liaison/link/intermediary between health/social services and the community to facilitate access to services and improve the quality and cultural competence of service delivery. A CHW also builds individual and community capacity by increasing health knowledge and self-sufficiency through a range of activities such as outreach, community education and self-sufficiency through a range of activities such as outreach, community education, informal counseling, social support, and advocacy.

Purpose of This Code

The CHW Code of Ethics is based on and supported by the core values adopted by the American Association of CHWs. The Code of Ethics outlined in this document provides a framework for CHWs, Supervisors, and employers of CHWs to discuss ethical issues facing the profession. Employers are encouraged to consider this Code when creating CHW programs. The responsibility of all CHWs is to strive for excellence by providing quality service and the most accurate information available to individuals, families, and communities.

The Code of Ethics is based upon commonly understood principles that apply to all professionals within the health and social service fields (e.g., promotion of social justice, positive health, and dignity). The Code, however, does not address all ethical issues facing CHWs and the absence of a rule does not imply that there is no ethical obligation present. As professionals, CHWs are encouraged to reflect on the ethical obligations that they have to the communities that they serve, and to share these reflections with others.

ARTICLE 1: Responsibility in the Delivery of Care

CHWs build trust and community capacity by improving the health and social welfare of the client they serve. When a conflict arises among individuals, groups, agencies, or institutions, CHWs should consider all issues and give priority to those that promote the wellness and quality of living for the individual/client. The following provisions promote the professional integrity of CHWs.

1.1 Honesty

CHWs are professionals that strive to ensure the best health outcomes for the communities they serve. They communicate the potential benefit and consequences of available services, including the programs they are employed under.

1.2 Confidentiality

CHWs respect the confidentiality, privacy, and trust of individuals, families, and communities that they serve. They understand and abide by employer policies, as well as state and federal confidentiality laws that are relevant to their work.

1.3 Scope of Ability and Training

CHWs are proactive and truthful about qualifications, competencies, and limitations on services they may provide, and should not misrepresent qualifications or competencies to individuals, families, communities or employers.

1.4 Quality of Care

CHWs strive to provide high quality of services to individuals, families, and communities. They do this through continued education, trainings, and an obligation to ensure the information they provide is up-to-date and accurate.

1.5 Referral of Appropriate Services

CHWs acknowledge when client issues are outside of their scope of practice and refer clients to the appropriate health, wellness, or social support services when necessary.

1.6 Legal Obligations

CHWs have an obligation to report actual or potential harm to individuals within the communities they serve to the appropriate authorities. CHWs have a responsibility to follow requirements set by statesⁱⁱ, the federal government, and/or their employing organizations. Responsibility of the larger society or specific legal obligations may supersede the loyalty owed to individual community members.

ARTICLE 2: Promotion of Equitable Relationships

CHWs focus their efforts on the well-being of the whole community. They value and respect the expertise and knowledge that each community member possesses. In turn, CHWs strive to create equitable partnerships with communities to address all issues of health and well-being.

2.1 Cultural Humility

CHWs possess expertise in the communities in which they serve. They maintain a high degree of humility and respect for the culturalⁱⁱⁱ diversity within each community. As advocates for their communities, CHWs have an obligation to inform employers and others when policies and procedures will offend or harm communities, or are ineffective within the communities where they work.

2.2 Maintaining the Trust of the Community

CHWs are often members of their communities and their effectiveness in providing services is derived from the trust placed in them by members of these communities. CHWs do not act in ways that could jeopardize the trust placed in them by the communities they serve.

2.3 Respect for Human Rights

CHWs respect the human rights of those they serve, advance principles of self-determination, and promote equitable relationships with all communities.

2.4 Anti-Discrimination

CHWs do not discriminate against any person or group on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, religion, social status, disability, or immigration status.

2.5 Client Relationship

CHWs maintain professional relationships with clients. They establish, respect, and actively maintain personal boundaries between them and their clients.

ARTICLE 3: Interactions with Other Service Providers

Community Health Workers maintain professional partnerships with other service providers in order to serve the community effectively.

3.1 Cooperation

CHWs place the well-being of those they serve above personal disagreements and work cooperatively with any other person or organization dedicated to providing care to those in need.

3.2 Conduct

CHWs promote integrity in the delivery of health and social services. They respect the rights, dignity, and worth of all people and have an ethical obligation to report any inappropriate behavior (e.g., sexual harassment, racial discrimination, etc.) to the proper authority.

3.3 Self-Presentation

CHWs are truthful and forthright in presenting their background and training to other service providers.

ARTICLE 4: Professional Rights and Responsibilities

The CHW profession is dedicated to excellence in the practice of promoting well-being in communities. Guided by common values, CHWs have the responsibility to uphold the principles and integrity of the profession as they assist families to make decisions impacting their well-being. CHWs embrace the individual, family, and community strengths and build upon them to increase community capacity.

4.1 Continuing Education

CHWs should remain up-to-date on any developments that substantially affect their ability to competently render services. CHWs strive to expand their professional knowledge base and competencies through education and participation in professional organizations.

4.2 Advocacy for Change in Law and Policy

CHWs are advocates for change and work on impacting policies that promote social justice and hold systems accountable for being responsive to communities.

4.3 Enhancing Community Capacity

CHWs assist individuals and communities in moving towards self-sufficiency in order to promote the creation of opportunities and resources that support their autonomy.

4.4 Wellness and Safety

CHWs are sensitive to their own personal well-being (physical, mental, and spiritual health) and strive to maintain a safe environment for themselves and the communities they serve.

4.5 Loyalty to the Profession

CHWs are members, leaders, and active participants in the local, state, and national professional organizations.

4.6 Advocacy for the Profession

CHWs are advocates for the profession. They are members, leaders, and active participants in local, state, and national professional organizations.

4.7 Recognition of Others

CHWs give recognition to others for their professional contributions and achievements.

ⁱThe Maine CHW Code of Ethics is based on the prototype provided in *The Community Health Worker Code of Ethics Toolkit* which was funded by a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and prepared by Jacqueline Scott and Lauren Dunning of the Harrison Institute for Public Law at the Georgetown University Law Center, with valuable assistance from member of the American Association of Community Health Workers.

ⁱⁱInformation on mandated reporting in Maine can be found at both of these web pages: <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/adults.shtml#abuse> and <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/ocfs/mandated-reporters.shtml>

ⁱⁱⁱ"Culture is defined broadly as the complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, laws, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by [a human] as a member of society. (Tylor, E. in Seymour-Smith, C. (1986) *Macmillan Dictionary of Anthropology*. The Macmillan Press LTD"



Paul R. LePage, Governor

Mary C. Mayhew, Commissioner

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