

NOTE: The Code of Ethics listed below was disseminated during the annual national Unity conference held by The Center for Sustainable Health Outreach (CSHO) in June 16-19, 2008 in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The theme for the conference designed by and for Community Health Workers was "Community Health Workers: The Winds of Change - From Grass Roots to Ground Breaking Public Health Professionals." The Code of Ethics will be in the CHW text book developed by City College/Community Health Works in San Francisco.

Code of Ethics for Community Health Workers

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, informal counseling, social support, and advocacy.

Purpose of this Code

The Community Health Worker Code of Ethics is based on and supported by the core values adopted by the American Association of Community Health Workers. The Code of Ethics outlined in this document provides a framework for Community Health Workers, supervisors, and employers of Community Health Workers to discuss ethical issues facing the profession. Employers are encouraged to consider this Code when creating Community Health Worker programs. The responsibility of all Community Health Workers 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 principals 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 Community Health Workers and the absence of a rule does not imply that there is no ethical obligation present. As professionals, Community Health Workers 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. Responsibilities in the Delivery of Care

Community Health Workers build trust and community capacity by improving the health and social welfare of the clients they serve. When a conflict arises among individuals, groups, agencies, or institutions, Community Health Workers 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 Community Health Workers.

1.1 Honesty

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

1.2 Confidentiality

Community Health Workers 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

Community Health Workers are truthful about qualifications, competencies and limitations on the services they may provide, and should not misrepresent qualifications or competencies to individuals, families, communities, or employers.

1.4 Quality of Care

Community Health Workers strive to provide high quality service to individuals, families, and communities. They do this through continued education, training, and an obligation to ensure the information they provide is up to date and accurate.

1.5 Referral to Appropriate Services

Community Health Workers 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

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

Article 2. Promotion of Equitable Relationships

Community Health Workers 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, Community Health Workers strive to create equitable partnerships with communities to address all issues of health and well-being.

2.1 Cultural Humility

Community Health Workers possess expertise in the communities in which they serve. They maintain a high degree of humility and respect for the cultural diversity within each community. As advocates for their communities, Community Health Workers 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

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

2.3 Respect for Human Rights

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

2.4 Anti-Discrimination

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

2.5 Client Relationships

Community Health Workers 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

Community Health Workers place the well-being of those they serve above personal disagreements and work cooperatively with any other person or organization dedicated to helping provide care to those in need.

3.2 Conduct

Community Health Workers 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

Community Health Workers are truthful and forthright in presenting their background and training to other service providers.

Article 4. Professional Rights and Responsibilities

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

4.1 Continuing Education

Community Health Workers should remain up-to-date on any developments that substantially affect their ability to competently render services. Community Health Workers 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

Community Health Workers are advocates for change and work on impacting policies that promote social justice and hold systems accountable for being responsive to communities. Policies that advance public health and well-being enable Community Health Workers to provide better care for the communities they serve.

4.3 Enhancing Community Capacity

Community Health Workers help individuals and communities move toward self-sufficiency in order to promote the creation of opportunities and resources that support their autonomy.

4.4 Wellness and Safety

Community Health Workers 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

Community Health Workers are loyal to the profession and aim to advance the efforts of other Community Health Workers worldwide.

4.6 Advocacy for the Profession

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

4.7 Recognition of Others

Community Health Workers give recognition to others for their professional contributions and achievements.