



## Community Health Workers

CHWs can become trusted resources to help you plan and disseminate information to at-risk populations in an emergency.

The following bullets are excerpted from *Introduction to Training Community Health Workers: Using Technology and Distance Education*. April 2006 (DHHS, HRSA)

<ftp://ftp.hrsa.gov/ruralhealth/TrainingCHW.pdf>

- CHWs play a pivotal role in meeting the health care needs of rural communities.
- They might work under many labels, including CHWs, Community Health Advisor (CHA), Promotora, ayudante, and other locality-specific titles.
- CHWs help increase access to health services (particularly among racial and ethnic minority groups).
- They contribute to broader social and community development.
- According to the National Rural Health Association, “the most significant commonalities of CHA programs are that:
  - they are focused on reaching at-risk populations;
  - the workers usually are indigenous to the target population;
  - their expertise is in knowing their communities rather than formal education” (National Rural Health Association, 2000).
- As “in-between people,” CHWs “draw on their insider status and understanding to act as culture and language brokers between their own community and systems of care.”
- Although not always accepted by the medical establishment, a number of key organizations support the development of CHW programs, including The American Public Health Association (2002), the CDC (2005), and the National Rural Health Association (2000).
- The Pew Health Professions Commission recommended in its 1998 report: *Recreating Health Professional Practice for a New Century* that public health schools, programs and departments focus some of their resources on training lay health workers and community residents to understand the mission of public health and equip them in basic competence to achieve this mission.
- CHWs might be paid or unpaid/volunteer, and could have varying levels of job-related education and/or training.
- As isolated populations increase, their dependence on these multi-tasking and frequently overburdened health care workers also increases.