Recommendation for Role and Response of Community Health Representatives/Community Health Workers during COVID-19 Pandemic

May 6, 2020

By building on prior successes and recognizing that CHRs, also referred to as community health workers, already play a role in emergency preparedness, expanding the roles and responsibilities represents a strategy for improving pandemic and community-level resilience. The National Association of Community Health Workers (NACHW) describes Community Health Workers (CHWs) as frontline public health workers who are trusted members of and/or have an unusually close understanding of the community served. This trusting relationship enables CHWs to serve as a liaison between health/social services and the community and to facilitate access to services and improve the quality and cultural competence of service delivery.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, providing public health guidance is critical for Community Health Representatives (CHRs) and Community Health Workers (CHWs). Tribal CHR programs that provide home care should consider protocols for home monitoring and outreach during the COVID-19 pandemic in coordination with local established healthcare practices and policies per Tribal authority under the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act, P. L. 93-638. *IHS Recommendations for Home and Community Health Care Workers during COVID-19 Pandemic* (March 19, 2020) provides interim Indian Health Service (IHS) guidance for Community Health Workers with protocols for patient home visits.

Due to the complexity and unique staffing of Tribal CHR programs, standardization of roles and responsibilities carried out by CHRs/CHWs in response to pandemic preparedness ranges from community-level educators and mobilizers contributing to surveillance systems and filling health service gaps.

Role of Community Health Representatives:

- **Understand the disease and stay current with recommendations.**
    - Know where to find accurate, up-to-date information.
        - IHS Coronavirus (COVID-19)
        - CDC Coronavirus (COVID-19)
    - Be a knowledgeable myth-buster
        - FEMA Coronavirus Rumor Control
- **Communication**
    - Engage with planning communication strategies (before, during, and after a public health emergency).
    - Listen to concerns
    - Provide education
    - Practice cultural competency
    - Document and report activities
- **Service coordination**
    - Link to local resources

- Conduct wellness check – medication refills, medication deliveries, chronic health conditions, mental health, food/water, coal/wood, livestock, etc.
- **Empowerment**
    - Help individuals and families recognize needs and advocate for themselves
    - Reinforce individual and community resiliency

State, local, tribal and territorial public health programs need flexibility to reassign tasks and shift priorities when delivering critical public health services. Protection of public health workers engaged in public health activities that require face-to-face interaction with clients in clinic and field settings is essential.

Tribal CHR programs may use the following guidance to develop current and future epidemic response plans:

1. **Prevent**
    - Prevent infection by promoting and practicing hand hygiene, home disinfection, and social distancing.
        - Detailed Disinfection Guidance
        - Prevent Spread of Coronavirus in the Home
        - Washing Hands with Shared Wash Pans COVID-19
        - Tips for Keeping Healthcare Workers and Their Families Safe from COVID-19
    - Organize and carry out social media campaigns to promote social distancing
        - What Tribal Members need to know about COVID-19
    - Encourage strategies in communities and online to promote mental, spiritual, cultural, and physical health and resilience.
        - Managing Stress During COVID-19
        - Stop the Spread: Protect yourself, family, and community (spiritual message)
    - Encourage strategies in the communities and online to promote positive parenting and open communication with children.
        - Positive Parenting During COVID-19
        - Talking to Kids about COVID-19
        - Parenting in the time of COVID-19
    - Deliver essential supplies to the elderly, and other vulnerable residents to support social distancing, shelter-in-place, isolation, and quarantine guidelines.
    - Make masks at home and donate them to supplement the stock of personal protective equipment (PPE) at local hospitals and local response teams.
2. **Detect**
    - Learn the signs and symptoms of COVID-19.
    - Assist staff in maintaining COVID-19 hotlines run by hospitals and public health departments.

- Screen clients and household members in advance, and at the time of the visit, for COVID-19 symptoms. If screening identifies a person with COVID-19, organizations should follow CDC recommendations:
    - Have options for postponing or rescheduling visits for persons who do not require immediate care.
    - Provide anticipatory guidance on symptoms and recommendations for testing.
    - Develop plans to manage clients with possible or confirmed COVID-19 and whose medical needs cannot be postponed. Plans should include clear guidance on infection control and PPE for managing patients with COVID-19. Include plans for when it is someone else in the residence who is ill. For example, ensure the ill person is isolated in a separate room from the client. If in an outdoor setting, maintain a distance of 6 feet or more when direct care is not required.
    - Contact the client's healthcare provider to report their patient's illness.

3. **Respond/Treat**
    - Provide options for telephone or video client visits. Call people with COVID-19 who are in self-isolation with mild symptoms and monitor them for worsening symptoms.
    - Provide moral support and organize food deliveries for people with COVID-19 who are in self-isolation.
    - Monitor patients for worsening symptoms and support rapid referral of people who require hospitalization in consultation with nurse care team.
    - Assist with public health officers to support contact tracing, symptom reporting, and monitoring of contacts of COVID-19 patients to ensure access to testing and treatment for people who develop signs and symptoms.
    - Wear proper protection (Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)) to deliver test kits, transport samples to labs, distribute educational materials as well as medicine, food and essentials to those in need.
    - Anticipate emotional reactions to stressful situations during COVID-19. Remind staff and clients that feeling sad, anxious, overwhelmed, or having trouble sleeping or other symptoms of distress is normal. If symptoms become worse, last longer than a month, or a person struggles to participate in their usual daily activities, encourage them to reach out to mental health for support and help.
        - Stress & Coping
        - Stress and Anxiety Management for Providers During COVID-19
        - Stress and Anxiety Management for Community Health Workers During Coronavirus
    - Help hospitals and non-profits raise funds for those in need.

4. **Recovery**

    - Assist with the coordination to support Tribal and urban communities with health care services (e.g., medical supplies, prescriptions, staffing, etc.)

- o Support the coordination of health, social, and counseling services (e.g. development of toolkits, comprehensive resource hub, promoting self-care for staff and community members, elder mental health, etc.)
  - ▪ Elder Mental Health During COVID-19
  - ▪ National Institute of Mental Health
- o Assist in the development of recovery timeframe to set bench marks, evaluate and monitor outcomes. (Tribal Epi centers, State Health Departments, CHR Data Mart).
- o Share best practices (e.g., develop a blue print of crisis/risk communication for future use).
- o Partner with healthcare system to ensure patients resume health care appointments with their providers.
- o Support local economic recovery (e.g., Buy Indian support contracts, Indian businesses and vendors).

Sources:
1. *IHS Recommendation for Home and Community Health Care Workers during COVID-19 Pandemic* March 19, 2020
2. Boyce MR and Katz R. Community health workers and pandemic preparedness: current and prospective roles. *Front. Public Health* 7:62. March 26, 2019
3. National Association of Community Health Workers (NACHW)
4. Wiah SO, Subah M, et. al. Prevent, detect, respond: how community health workers can help in the fight against COVID-19. *BMJ Opinion* Mar. 27, 2020

CDC Guidance
Caring for Someone
CDC Coronavirus (COVID-19)
Cloth Face Covers
COVID-19 Symptoms
Detailed Disinfection Guidance
Interim CDC Guidance on Handling Non-COVID-19 Public Health Activities that Require Face-to-Face Interaction with Clients in the Clinic and Field in the Current COVID-19 Pandemic
Preventing the Spread of Coronavirus Disease 2019 in Homes and Residential Communities
Principles of Contact Tracing
Public Health Communicators Get Your Community Ready for Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)
Social Distancing
Stress & Coping
Using Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
What To Do If You Are Sick

FEMA Guidance
Coronavirus Rumor Control

IHS Guidance
[IHS Coronavirus (COVID-19)](#)

Johns Hopkins University Center for American Indian Health
[Elder Mental Health During COVID-19](#)
[Managing Stress During COVID-19](#)
[Positive Parenting During COVID-19](#)
[Prevent Spread of Coronavirus in the Home](#)
[Stay Home (Shelter-in-Place)](#)
[Stop the Spread: Protect yourself, family, and community (spiritual message)](#)
[Talking to Kids about COVID-19](#)
[Tips for Keeping Healthcare Workers and Their Families Safe from COVID-19](#)
[Washing Hands with Shared Wash Pans COVID-19](#)
[What Tribal Members need to know about COVID-19](#)

World Health Organization
[Parenting in the time of COVID-19](#)