

Differentiating between Community Health Workers (CHWs) and Patient Navigators (PNs)

Community Health Worker (CHW)

Also referred to as lay health worker, community outreach worker, community health advisor, promotora or lay health advocate.

A CHW is a lay member of the community who is trained in some way to deliver an intervention to community members in community settings. In Colorado, training is provided by community-based organizations deploying CHWs and the community college system. Typically, CHWs share ethnicity, language, SES and life experiences with the community members they serve. Historically, CHWs have worked primarily with vulnerable, underserved populations and are deployed by community-based organizations.

Examples of CHW activities may include:

- Outreach to those eligible but not enrolled in health coverage and encourage them to apply
- Delivering culturally appropriate health information and education
- Encouraging residents to participate in health screening and administering basic screening instruments
- Advocating for community health needs

In 2009, the Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics created a distinct occupation code for CHWs.

Patient Navigator (PN)

Also referred to as lay navigator, health navigator or resource navigator.

A PN assists individuals in reducing and eliminating barriers to health care access and in negotiating complex health delivery systems. In Colorado training programs are available to prepare PNs for this role, ranging from community college certificate programs, on-line trainings and university offerings. Typically, PNs are employed by health delivery systems including primary care, specialty care and managed care.

Examples of PN activities may include:

- Assessing credible community resources, developing partnerships and making referrals for the patient population served,
- Care coordination,
- Connecting patients with resources,
- Working with patients that have high system utilization to access care appropriately,
- Supporting and motivating health behavior change,
- Implementing population health strategies.

Patient Navigators are a new occupation developed as a part of the transformation of care, responsive to patient and system needs. In 2014, a separate, standard occupation code was requested for PNs which is pending.

Sources:

Patient Navigator Outreach and Chronic Disease Prevention Act, 2005

Patient Navigator Research Program, National Cancer Institute, 2005-2010

CHW evidence-based Models toolbox, HRSA, 2011

Review of lay health workers in primary and community health care for MCH and management of infectious diseases, Cochrane Collaboration, 2010,

Community Health Worker National Workforce Study, HRSA, 2007

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