

COMMUNITY HEALTHCORPS

Promoting Health Care for America's Underserved
Developing Tomorrow's Health Care Workforce

What is Community HealthCorps?

Founded in 1995 by the National Association of Community Health Centers, Community HealthCorps is the largest health-focused, national AmeriCorps program that promotes health care for America's underserved, while developing tomorrow's health care workforce. The mission is to improve health care access and enhance workforce development through community health center sponsored AmeriCorps including VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America), and related programs.

Overarching goals to address the needs of medically underserved and other vulnerable populations served by community health centers are as follows:

- Increase access to and utilization of primary and preventive health care.
- Improve the capacity of health centers to provide quality and preventable health care services.
- Increase the quality and availability of preventive and primary care services and programs.
- Foster collaborations and partnerships that ensure the continuity and sustainability of programs and services.
- Encourage Community HealthCorps members to pursue further education and careers in community health through mentorship and experiential learning.
- Create a culture of civic engagement and volunteerism to strengthen preventive and primary health care.

HealthCorps program sponsors are primarily community health centers (CHCs) and primary care associations (PCAs) that host one or more teams of HealthCorps members. Operating since 2001, HealthCorps*VISTA is comprised of project stations - predominantly CHCs, PCAs and hospitals that typically host one or two HealthCorps*VISTA members. Most HealthCorps members and all HealthCorps*VISTA members enroll for a full year of service, and serve for up to two terms of service. In the 2006-07 program year, more than 800 Community HealthCorps members serve through 41 partner organizations at an estimated 150 delivery sites across 19 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

Members Reflect and Work in Underserved Communities

Members serve rural and racially/culturally diverse urban communities and suburban, as well as migrant farm worker, homeless and public housing populations. Members are as racially, ethnically and economically diverse as the communities they serve. Educational attainment varies from high school and some college to graduate degrees. In addition, some members are active or retired health and social service professionals. No matter their background, members become part of a community's struggle for better health and economic independence.

Members are Highly Trained

Members acquire new skills and knowledge that enhance their effectiveness and value to patients through pre-service orientation, in-service and advanced trainings. Training is conducted by health centers, national program staff, and others with subject matter expertise.

Members are known as “Agents of Change” in Clinical and Preventive Services

Focused on direct services, HealthCorps members provide a variety of health services/programs for patients and community by serving as community health workers (CHWs). Examples of Activities:

- Navigating the health care system;
- Establishing a “medical home” and improving utilization of health care;
- Individual and group health promotion/disease prevention education;
- Adopting “self-care” practices that lead to improved health status;
- Follow-up, case management, and support on treatment plans;
- Enrollment in public health insurance; and
- Assessing other patient needs (financial assistance, housing, legal & etc).

Focused on indirect services, HealthCorps*VISTA members alleviate poverty by increasing the capacity of health centers, and improving the quality and availability of health services to enhance the quality of life of impoverished and other medically underserved populations. Examples of Activities:

- Needs Assessment and Program Evaluation
- Resource Generation (Funding, Volunteers & Partners)
- Strategic Planning & Program Designing
- Health Curriculum Development

An Effective Model for Health Care Delivery and Capacity Building

Referred to by many names, community health workers (CHWs) have various long-standing roles in the United States and worldwide, but all strive to positively impact the health and well-being of communities they serve. Research indicates that community health workers are particularly effective at:

- Increasing access to health services;
- Increasing knowledge about a variety of health issues;
- Facilitating behavior change; and
- Providing social support and culturally competent, cost-effective care for medically underserved populations.

During the first ten years of the program, over 2,500 HealthCorps members provided:

- 411,150 outreach and case management encounters with medically underserved individuals, assisting them to receive and better utilize preventive and primary health care;
- 321,230 patient encounters to improve utilization of health care services through education and self-management initiatives (e.g. HRSA-sponsored Disparities Collaboratives); and
- 170,500 patient encounters to link patients with health and social services (e.g. housing, employment, child care) provided by other agencies and organizations in the community.

National Director – Jason Patnosh

For more information about the Community HealthCorps program, visit us online at:

<http://www.nachc.com/community-healthcorps.cfm>