

# Systematic Review of U.S.-Based Randomized Controlled Trials Using Community Health Workers

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## What Is the Purpose of This Review?

- To assess what is known about the effectiveness of using community health workers (CHW) in the U.S. health care setting.

## What Is the Problem?

- Racial and ethnic disparities in health status and healthcare are important problems in the United States; CHWs may help to address these disparities.
- Numerous studies have used CHWs, but no consensus exists about the effectiveness of CHWs in improving public health.

## What Are the Findings?

- Twelve studies have evaluated the effectiveness of CHWs using the strongest study design possible (randomized control trial).
- CHWs helped to improve screening for breast cancer and cervical cancer.
- CHWs helped to improve blood pressure control and eating habits.
- CHWs helped to enhance child development and improve use of early intervention services of children at risk for developmental disabilities.
- CHWs have been used to address health issues among several racial and ethnic populations, including African Americans, Latinos, Vietnamese Americans, Caucasians, and Native Americans.
- The studies demonstrated that CHWs can work effectively within the context of the U.S. health care setting.

## Who Should Care Most?

- CHWs and health care policy makers.
- Community-based organizations and community health centers, such as the National Association of Community Health Centers.
- Medical institutions and other health care providers.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

1. Consider using CHWs as a potentially effective method to address communication, behavioral, and health knowledge gaps that exist between underserved populations and the U.S. healthcare system.
2. Consider using CHWs as a potentially effective method to improve health care access and health care outcomes in the U.S. health care and public health settings.
3. Consider using CHWs as a potentially effective method of culturally tailoring public health and health care interventions.

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Gibbons MC, Tyus NC. Systematic Review of U.S.-Based Randomized Controlled Trials Using Community Health Workers. *Progress in Community Health Partnerships: Research, Education, and Action*. 2007;4:371-381. The Community Policy Brief is intended to inform community based organizations, public health policy makers, and other individuals whose primary interest is not research, but who would be interested in the application and translation of research findings for practical purposes.