Health Educators and Community Health Workers

Summary

Health educators and community health workers teach people about the importance of healthy behaviors.

Quick Facts: Health Educators and Community Health Workers

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<th>Quick Facts: Health Educators and Community Health Workers</th>
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What Health Educators and Community Health Workers Do

Health educators teach people about behaviors that promote wellness. They develop and implement strategies to improve the health of individuals and communities. Community health workers collect data and discuss health concerns with members of specific populations or communities.

Work Environment

Health educators and community health workers work in a variety of settings, including hospitals, nonprofit organizations, government, doctors’ offices, private businesses, and colleges. They generally work full time.

How to Become a Health Educator or Community Health Worker

Health educators need a bachelor’s degree. Many employers require the Certified Health Education Specialist (CHES) credential. Requirements for community health workers vary, although they typically have at least a high school diploma and must complete a brief period of on-the-job training. Some states have certification programs for community health workers.

Pay

In May 2012, the median annual wage for health educators was $48,790. The median annual wage for community health workers was $34,620 in May 2012.

Job Outlook

Employment of health educators and community health workers is projected to grow 21 percent from 2012 to 2022, faster than the average for all occupations. Growth will be driven by efforts to improve health outcomes and to reduce healthcare costs by teaching
What Health Educators and Community Health Workers Do

Health educators and community health workers educate people about the availability of healthcare services.

Similar Occupations
Compare the job duties, education, job growth, and pay of health educators and community health workers with similar occupations.

More Information, Including Links to O*NET
Learn more about health educators and community health workers by visiting additional resources, including O*NET, a source on key characteristics of workers and occupations.

What Health Educators and Community Health Workers Do

Health educators teach people about behaviors that promote wellness. They develop and implement strategies to improve the health of individuals and communities. Community health workers provide a link between the community and health educators and other healthcare workers and develop and implement strategies to improve the health of individuals and communities. They collect data and discuss health concerns with members of specific populations or communities. Although the two occupations often work together, responsibilities of health educators and community health workers are distinct.

Duties

Health educators typically do the following:

- Assess the needs of the people and communities they serve
- Develop programs and events to teach people about health topics
- Teach people how to cope with or manage existing health conditions
- Evaluate the effectiveness of programs and educational materials
- Help people find health services or information
- Provide training programs for other health professionals or community health workers
- Supervise staff who implement health education programs
- Collect and analyze data to learn about their audience and improve programs and services
- Advocate for improved health resources and policies that promote health

Community health workers do the following:

- Provide outreach and discuss health care concerns with community members
- Educate people about the importance and availability of healthcare services, such as cancer screenings
- Collect data
- Report findings to health educators and other healthcare providers
- Provide informal counseling and social support
Conduct outreach programs
Ensure that people have access to the healthcare services they need
Advocate for individual and community needs

The duties of health educators, who are sometimes called health education specialists, vary with their work settings. Most work in health care facilities, colleges, public health departments, nonprofits, and private businesses. Health educators who teach health classes in middle and high schools are considered teachers. For more information, see the profiles on middle school teachers and high school teachers.

In health care facilities, health educators may work one-on-one with patients and their families. They teach patients about their diagnoses and about any necessary treatments or procedures. They may be called patient navigators because they help consumers find out about their health insurance options and direct people to outside resources, such as support groups and home health agencies. They lead hospital efforts in community health improvement. Health educators in health care facilities also help organize health screenings, such as blood pressure checks, and health classes on topics such as installing a car seat correctly. They also create programs to train medical staff to interact better with patients. For example, they may teach doctors how to explain complicated procedures to patients in simple language.

In colleges, health educators create programs and materials on topics that affect young adults, such as smoking and alcohol use. They may train students to be peer educators and supervise the students’ delivery of health information in person or through social media. Health educators also advocate for campus wide policies to promote health.

In public health departments, health educators administer public health campaigns on topics such as emergency preparedness, immunizations, proper nutrition or stress management. They develop materials to be used by other public health officials. During emergencies, they may provide safety information to the public and the media. Some health educators work with other professionals to create public policies that support healthy behaviors and environments. They may also oversee grants and grant-funded programs to improve the health of the public. Some participate in statewide and local committees dealing with topics such as aging.

In nonprofits (including community health organizations), health educators create programs and materials about health issues for the community that their organization serves. They help organizations obtain funding and other resources. Many nonprofits focus on a particular disease or audience, so health educators in these organizations limit programs to that specific topic or audience. For example, a health educator may design a program to teach people with diabetes how to better manage their condition or a program for teen mothers on how to care for their newborns. In addition, health educators may educate policymakers about ways to improve public health and work on securing grant funding for programs to promote health and disease awareness.

In private businesses, health educators identify common health problems among employees and create programs to improve health. They work with management to develop incentives for employees to adopt healthy behaviors, such as losing weight or controlling cholesterol. Health educators recommend changes to the workplace, such as creating smoke-free areas, to improve employee health.

Community health workers have an in-depth knowledge of the communities they serve. They identify health-related issues that affect a community, they collect data, and they discuss health concerns with the people they serve. For example, they may help eligible residents of a neighborhood enroll in programs such as Medicaid or Medicare, explaining the benefits that these programs offer. Community health workers address any barriers to care and provide referrals for such needs as food, housing, education, and mental health services.

Community health workers report their findings to health educators and healthcare providers so that the educators can create new programs or adjust existing programs or events to better suit the demands of their audience. Community health workers also advocate for the health needs of community members. In addition, they conduct outreach to engage community residents, assist residents with health system navigation, and to improve care coordination.

Work Environment
Health educators often work in hospitals, where they help patients understand and adjust to their diagnosis.

Health educators held about 58,900 jobs in 2012. Community health workers held about 40,500 jobs in 2012.

The industries that employed the most health educators in 2012 were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospitals; state, local, and private</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambulatory health care services</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious, grantmaking, civic, professional, and similar organizations</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social assistance</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The industries that employed the most community health workers in 2012 were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual, family, community, and vocational rehabilitation services</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State and local government, excluding education and hospitals</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious, grantmaking, civic, professional, and similar organizations</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospitals; state, local, and private</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outpatient, laboratory, and other ambulatory care services</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Health educators and community health workers work in a variety of settings, including hospitals, nonprofit organizations, government, doctors’ offices, private businesses, and colleges.

Although most health educators work in an office, they may spend a lot of time away from the office to carry out programs or attend meetings. Community health workers may spend much of their time in the field, communicating with community members and holding events.

**Work Schedules**

Most health educators and community health workers work full time. They may need to work nights and weekends to attend programs or meetings.

**How to Become a Health Educator or Community Health Worker**
Health educators work in a variety of settings, such as schools, hospitals, and colleges.

Health educators need a bachelor’s degree. Some employers may require the Certified Health Education Specialist (CHES) credential. Community health workers typically have at least a high school diploma and must complete a brief period of on-the-job training. Some states have certification programs for community health workers.

**Education**

Entry-level health educator positions require a bachelor’s degree in health education or health promotion. These programs teach students theories and methods of health education and help students gain the knowledge and skills they need to develop health education materials and programs. Most programs include an internship.

Some positions, such as those in the federal government or in state public health agencies, require a master’s or doctoral degree. Graduate programs are commonly in community health education, school health education, public health education, or health promotion. Entering a master’s degree program requires a bachelor’s degree, but a variety of undergraduate majors may be acceptable.

Community health workers typically have a high school diploma, although some jobs may require postsecondary education. Education programs may lead to a 1-year certificate or a 2-year associate’s degree and cover topics such as wellness, ethics, and cultural awareness, among others. Community health workers typically have a shared language or life experience and an understanding of the community that they serve.

**Training**

Community health workers typically complete a brief period of on-the-job training. This training often covers core competencies such as communication or outreach skills as well as information about the specific health topics that they will be focusing on. For instance, community health workers who work with Alzheimer’s patients may learn about how to communicate effectively with patients dealing with dementia.

**Licenses, Certifications, and Registrations**

Some employers require health educators to be a Certified Health Education Specialist (CHES). CHES certification, offered by the National Commission for Health Education Credentialing, Inc., is awarded after a candidate passes an exam. The exam is aimed at entry-level health educators who have completed a bachelor’s degree or are within 3 months of completion. To maintain their certification, health educators must complete 75 hours of continuing education every 5 years. There is also a Master Certified Health Education Specialist (MCHES) credential for health educators with advanced education and experience.

Most states do not require community health workers to become certified, however voluntary certification exists or is being considered or developed in a number of states. Requirements vary but may include completing an approved training program. For more information, contact your state’s board of health, nursing, or human services.

**Important Qualities**
Analytical skills. Health educators collect and analyze data and other information in order to evaluate programs and to determine the needs of the people they serve.

Instructional skills. Health educators and community health workers should be comfortable with public speaking so that they can lead programs, teach classes, and facilitate discussion with clients and families.

Interpersonal skills. Health educators and community health workers interact with many people from a variety of backgrounds. These workers must be good listeners and be culturally sensitive to respond to the needs of the people they serve.

Problem-solving skills. Health educators and community health workers must think creatively about how to improve the health of their audience through health education programs. In addition, health educators and community health workers may need to solve problems that arise in planning programs, such as changes to their budget or resistance from the community they are serving.

Writing skills. Health educators and community health workers develop written materials to convey health-related information. Health educators also write proposals to develop programs and apply for funding.

Other Experience

Community health workers usually have some knowledge of a specific community, population, medical condition, or disability. The ability to speak a foreign language may be helpful.

Pay

The median annual wage for health educators was $48,790 in May 2012. The median wage is the wage at which half the workers in an occupation earned more than that amount and half earned less. The lowest 10 percent earned less than $27,730, and the top 10 percent earned more than $86,810.

In May 2012, the median annual wages for health educators in the top five industries in which these educators worked were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Median Salary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hospitals; state, local, and private</td>
<td>$60,360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>$50,580</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambulatory health care services</td>
<td>$46,470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious, grantmaking, civic, professional, and similar organizations</td>
<td>$45,090</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social assistance</td>
<td>$36,500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The median annual wage for community health workers was $34,620 in May 2012. The lowest 10 percent earned less than $20,340, and the top 10 percent earned more than $58,650.

In May 2012, the median annual wages for community health workers in the top five industries in which they worked were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Median Annual Wage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hospitals; state, local, and private</td>
<td>$42,610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State and local government, excluding education and</td>
<td>$37,040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hospitals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious, grantmaking, civic, professional, and similar</td>
<td>$35,760</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>organizations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outpatient, laboratory, and other ambulatory care</td>
<td>$32,750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual, family, community, and vocational</td>
<td>$30,030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rehabilitation services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most health educators and community health workers work full time. They may need to work nights and weekends to attend programs or meetings.

**Job Outlook**

Employment of health educators and community health workers is projected to grow 21 percent from 2012 to 2022, faster than the average for all occupations. Growth will be driven by efforts to improve health outcomes and to reduce healthcare costs by teaching people about healthy habits and behaviors and utilization of available health care services.

As healthcare costs continue to rise, insurance companies, employers, and governments are trying to find ways to both improve the quality of care and health outcomes, while curbing costs. One way is to employ health educators and community health workers, who teach people how to live healthy lives and how to avoid costly diseases and medical procedures. Lifestyle changes can reduce the probability of contracting a number of illnesses, such as lung cancer, HIV, heart disease, and skin cancer. If a person already has a disease such as asthma, health educators and community health workers help people understand how to manage their condition and avoid unnecessary trips to the emergency room. Health educators and community health workers help people understand how what they do affects their health.

For many illnesses, such as breast cancer and testicular cancer, finding the disease early greatly increases the likelihood that treatment will be successful. Therefore, it is important for people to know how to identify potential problems and when to seek medical help. The need to provide the public with this kind of information is expected to result in an increased demand for health educators and community health workers.

Federal health reform will increase access to medical care, such as preventative screenings. Health educators and community health workers will be needed to direct patients in obtaining access to healthcare services. In addition, a number of state and local programs designed to manage conditions such as diabetes and obesity include health educators and community health workers as part of intervention teams.

Job Prospects

Community health workers who have completed a formal education program and those who have experience working with a specific population may enjoy favorable job prospects. In addition, opportunities may be better for candidates who speak a foreign language.

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health educators and community health workers</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>99,400</td>
<td>120,800</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>21,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health educators</td>
<td>21-1091</td>
<td>58,900</td>
<td>70,100</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>11,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community health workers</td>
<td>21-1094</td>
<td>40,500</td>
<td>50,700</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>10,200</td>
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Similar Occupations

This table shows a list of occupations with job duties that are similar to those of health educators and community health workers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OCCUPATION</th>
<th>JOB DUTIES</th>
<th>ENTRY-LEVEL EDUCATION</th>
<th>2012 MEDIAN PAY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dietitians and Nutritionists</td>
<td>Dietitians and nutritionists are experts in food and nutrition. They advise people on what to eat in order to lead a healthy lifestyle or achieve a specific health-related goal.</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>$55,240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epidemiologists</td>
<td>Epidemiologists are public health professionals who investigate patterns and causes of disease and injury in humans. They seek to reduce the risk and occurrence of negative health outcomes through research, community education, and health policy.</td>
<td>Master's degree</td>
<td>$65,270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Teachers</td>
<td>High school teachers help prepare students for life after graduation. They teach academic lessons and various skills that students will need to attend college and to enter the job market.</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>$55,050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health Counselors and Marriage and Family Therapists</td>
<td>Mental health counselors and marriage and family therapists help people manage and overcome mental and emotional disorders and problems with their family and relationships. They listen to clients and ask questions, to help the clients understand their problems and develop strategies to improve their lives.</td>
<td>Master's degree</td>
<td>$41,500</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Middle School Teachers

Middle school teachers help students build on the fundamentals they learned in elementary school and prepare them for the more difficult curriculum they will face in high school.

Bachelor's degree $53,430

Postsecondary Teachers

Postsecondary teachers instruct students in a wide variety of academic and vocational subjects beyond the high school level. They also conduct research and publish scholarly papers and books.

See How to Become One $68,970

School and Career Counselors

School counselors help students develop social skills and succeed in school. Career counselors assist people with the process of making career decisions, by helping them choose a career or educational program.

Master's degree $53,610

Social and Human Service Assistants

Social and human service assistants help people get through difficult times or get additional support. They assist other workers, such as social workers, and they help clients find benefits or community services.

High school diploma or equivalent $28,850

Social Workers

Social workers help people solve and cope with problems in their everyday lives. One group of social workers, clinical social workers, also diagnose and treat mental, behavioral, and emotional issues.

See How to Become One $44,200

Substance Abuse and Behavioral Disorder Counselors

Substance abuse and behavioral disorder counselors advise people who suffer from alcoholism, drug addiction, eating disorders, or other behavioral problems. They provide treatment and support to help the client recover from addiction or modify problem behaviors.

High school diploma or equivalent $38,520

Contacts for More Information

For more information about health educators and community health workers, visit

Society for Public Health Education
American Public Health Association

For more information about the Certified Health Education Specialist (CHES) credential, visit

National Commission for Health Education Credentialing, Inc.

O*NET

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