Overview - Community Based Workers

Well-designed Community Based Worker (CBW) programs include clearly defined job roles and expectations, careful recruitment, appropriate training, and consistent and ongoing support and supervision.

Who are Community Based Workers?

A CBW is a community member who is employed or contracted to provide a link between the program and the community and/or undertake specific non clinical work.

Lessons Learned

The information in this series has been collated from a rapid evidence assessment of the international literature of CBW programs and an audit of current practices and experiences of programs employing CBWs in remote northern Australian communities, undertaken by Pandanus Evaluation & Planning Services in collaboration with The Fred Hollows Foundation Indigenous Australia Program. This series aims to provide access to evidence of ‘what works’ and fill a knowledge gap.

From the international literature…

- There is research and evidence available to demonstrate that CBWs can play an important role in promoting health, preventing disease and improving health outcomes. CBWs can improve access to and coverage of communities with basic health services, can undertake actions that lead to improved health outcomes and can make a valuable contribution to community development.
- Well-designed CBW programs involve careful recruitment, clearly defined job roles and expectations, appropriate training, and consistent and ongoing support and supervision. CBW programs are complex, requiring investment and commitment by program managers.
- CBW programs are neither a remedy for a weak health system nor a cheap option to provide access to health care for underserved populations.
- For CBWs to be effective, “they must be carefully selected, appropriately trained and – very important – adequately and continuously supported.”
- There is no single accepted definition of a community based worker (CBW) in the health and community services areas.
- Reviews and reports detailing sound practice in recruiting, employing, training and supporting CBWs are lacking. Knowing what works and what does not has been described as constituting the biggest knowledge gap.
Questions to guide development, implementation and evaluation of CBW Programs

The Job Description
When planning new or expanding the roles of existing CBWs:
• Are CBWs the most appropriate people to do the required job?
• Are CBWs’ roles and duties likely to be regarded as acceptable by CBWs and the target population?
• What is the workload and when and where will each duty be performed?
• What kinds of skills and training will CBWs require in order to undertake the role and perform the duties?
• How much will it cost to employ CBWs?

Recruitment
To develop an effective recruitment strategy:
• What are the specific recruitment needs for the program?
• What are the selection criteria?
• What is the recruitment process?
• How do available resources influence recruitment?

Training and Support
When planning the training program:
• What are the CBWs expected to be able to do; what is their job?
• How will the training program be organised?
• Who will be responsible for the management of the training program?
• Who will be involved in providing training?
• How can optimal learning be achieved through training?
• Who will provide follow-up monitoring of performance and in-service training?

Supervision and Support
When planning and implementing the program:
• What is the current situation in each community with regard to supervision and support for CBWs?
• What are the objectives of CBW supervision?
• What standards and guidelines are needed to guide CBW performance?
• Who will perform the supervision? Who will supervise the supervisors?
• How often should supervision be done?
• How can supervision visits be planned, implemented and tracked?
• How will information be used to improve performance?

Monitoring and Evaluation
• Who would like to know how the project is going?
• How will the results be used?
• What are the steps in developing a monitoring and evaluation system?
• What methods or tools will be used for monitoring?
• When is it time to evaluate?
• What type and level of evaluation is realistic and useful?

References and resources
Early Childhood Nutrition and Anaemia Prevention Project

Indigenous Australia Program, Trachoma Elimination Program, Development Effectiveness Bulletin 4, February 2014

This publication may contain images of persons that have passed away. The Fred Hollows Foundation would like to acknowledge these persons and pay our respects to them and their families.

Developed by Pandanus Evaluation & Planning Services in collaboration with The Fred Hollows Foundation Indigenous Australia Program. Additional information about the development of this project can be found at http://www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/key-resources/promotion-resources?lid=30884

Designed by Elizabeth Cook
elizabethjcook@optusnet.com.au

Adapted from questions in Perry and Crigler (2014)