Recruitment of 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 project and the community and/or undertake specific non-clinical work.

The value of Community Based Workers
Research demonstrates that CBWs can play an important role in promoting health, preventing disease and improving health outcomes, in both developing and developed countries, especially where health inequalities exist. 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.

Recruitment

Employ the ‘right’ people - Community Based Workers who have the confidence and trust of community members, the skills for the job, the required personal qualities and the motivation to serve their community.

From the international literature...

- CBWs should be recruited from the communities they serve and reflect the linguistic and cultural diversity of the population served.
- CBWs should be selected on the basis of their motivation to serve the community they will be working in. Belonging to and being accepted by this community is crucial. Prior level of education is less important, although literacy and numeracy facilitate participation in training and follow-up activities.
- Communities should have a say in their selection. This process could include selection by local health personnel, by specially constituted community health committees, by existing locally based program personnel or by elders.

[CBW] recruitment is an important part of any community health program because the process of selecting and deploying appropriate and well-qualified [CBWs] will lay the foundation for the program. Ensuring community participation in the planning and execution of the recruitment, selection, and supervision process is considered a best practice as it can improve program outcome.

W Jaskiewicz and R Duessom in Perry, H and Crigler, L (Eds), 2014 pp 8-12 and 8-13

Lessons Learned
This information sheet is one of a series about essential conditions for successful programs involving Community Based Workers. The sheets are based on a review of the international literature and experiences of program staff in Northern Australia.

1. Overview
2. Benefits and challenges
3. Defining the job
4. Recruitment
5. Training and support
6. Supervision and support
7. Monitoring and evaluation
From practice in Northern Australia…

Getting the word out – advertising the position

Program staff let community members know that a CBW position is available by advertising locally through the media and on the community notice board, through regional councils and non-government organisations and employment services. Program staff also visit communities and spread the word through key organisations, at the same time seeking recommendations about potential applicants. Recommended people may also be approached directly to discuss the position.

Choosing the right people - interviews

Interviews for CBW positions are best conducted face-to-face in the community. Involve community members in the panel, but be aware of kinship relationships and any community conflict that could affect the selection process. Involve one or two of the key people on the interview panel who will be working closely with the CBW as these working relationships will affect the success of the program.

Selection criteria

Programs in Northern Australia use a range of different selection criteria to decide on the best applicant for the CBW position. Most often selection criteria are addressed verbally during the interview. Less commonly, applicants may also be asked to provide a written application against some selection criteria. This requirement may be appropriate when literacy is especially important for the job.

Selection criteria should assess applicants’ knowledge and skills as well as their personal qualities. Belonging and acceptance by the community may be more important than specific education or qualifications, as these can be gained ‘on the job’. Examples of selection criteria include:

- Approval of Elders and local stakeholders
- Sound cultural knowledge and knowledge of community governance structures
- Writing skills and a good understanding of the English language
- Willingness to learn relevant health information and ability to deliver to target group
- Openness to two-way learning
- Ability to meet requirements for ‘working with children’ card (Ochre Card)
- Ability to travel away from their communities
- A driver’s license (usually desirable, sometimes essential for position)
- Passion for working with families, children; want to work in the Program area; commitment to health and well being of local people
- Experience and/or qualifications in the area (usually preferable but not essential); willingness to undertake formal qualifications
- Ability to work independently, unsupervised; are reliable and honest
- Flexible and with a positive outlook
- Ability to work in a team
- Ability to maintain confidentiality
- Ability to work with people of other cultures
- Ability to be a role model

An example from the field...

A bi-cultural community development program to educate and support young girls and women in their communities around many different areas of health takes this approach:

Positions are advertised in the community through media and on notice boards for two weeks. A panel is set up of one health nurse or midwife and two Aboriginal workers, such as the coordinator and a community member. The panel interviews all the applicants and decides on the best applicant for the position and the community. Applicants are assessed against the following selection criteria:

- Have the respect of the people in the community
- Have a sound knowledge of health
- Have a good knowledge of the problems in the community around health issues
- Are able to work with all groups of people in the community

I feel it is important when doing interviews with community people to be able to make them feel comfortable in the interview. And questions to be relevant to the position, not to complicate them, use plain English - not all CBWs have the literacy town people have.

Elizabeth Cook
Aboriginal Coordinator of a program supporting Elders to support families.

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

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