Supervision and support 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 program 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.

Supervision and Support
Ensure adequate supervision and support for CBWs to achieve the required outcomes. Establish a process for on-going review.

From the international literature...
Regular and reliable support and supervision is needed to ensure the success of the CBW program. Being able to provide adequate supervision and support for CBWs to undertake the required job is a major challenge of employing CBWs. Quality supervision has been shown to influence CBWs’ motivation and retention rates, and improve CBW productivity.

The person undertaking the supervision needs to be skilled in providing feedback and ensuring a two-way flow of information. CBWs also need a supportive and enabling work environment, including:

- a manageable workload in terms of a realistic number of tasks and clients
- an organised manner of carrying out these tasks, a reasonable geographic distance to cover, the needed supplies and equipment
- respect and acceptance from the community and the health system

Acceptance, support and respect from both the community and the [organization or] formal health system are essential for [CBWs] to be effective. While respect from the community is a key criterion for initial selection of [CBWs]... in large part the organization or formal health system engaging [CBWs] has the responsibility for ensuring that the initial acceptance and support is maintained.

A study was undertaken in England on effective approaches to supporting CBWs in public health roles. The table below summaries some of the results focusing on ‘approaches that work’.

**Summary of approaches that work**

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<th>Professional support</th>
<th>Organisational support</th>
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<td>• Adopting an inclusive approach to recruitment and recruiting from the local community</td>
<td>• Providing an adequate infrastructure to support people beyond training</td>
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<td>• Designing flexible training packages which enable the participation of people traditionally excluded from the education system</td>
<td>• Involving local people in planning, design and delivery</td>
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<td>• Establishing a learning culture in which participants are committed and interested</td>
<td>• Adequate program funding</td>
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<td>• Making connections to adult education opportunities both for self-development and as a route to employment</td>
<td>• Awarding grants to small community organisations</td>
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<td>• Providing opportunities for people to have fun</td>
<td>• Establishing effective partnerships between the health service and other sectors</td>
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<td>• Paying expenses</td>
<td>• Passionate leadership at the highest level</td>
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<td>• Establishing clear boundaries in relation to professional roles but valuing the equal worth of volunteers and paid workers</td>
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**From practice in Northern Australia...**

Based on a survey of program managers, management arrangements and supervision and support for CBWs vary greatly throughout Northern Australia. These arrangements depend on factors such as the nature and scope of the program, where it is located, the availability of suitable supervising staff, the experience and skills of the CBWs and other logistical factors.

CBWs usually receive some type of supervision on a regular basis, either by a locally based person or visiting person. Less often, CBWs receive only occasional supervision, either on site or by visiting staff or by phone. A combination of supervision strategies may also be used such as regular visits by supervisors who live outside of the community with video and phone link-ups in between.

Supervision varied depending on location and availability of local staff. In some communities supervision was provided on a daily basis by the local manager. In other communities, day to day supervision was unavailable and CBWs were responsible for performing their duties with remote supervision via phone or video conferencing from the program manager only. In all cases, CBWs received monthly/bimonthly visits from program coordinators and education officers.

Program Manager

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.

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