

Implementing Support Strategies for Community Health Workers to Support Older Adults and Their Caregivers



As the number of older adults continues to grow, community health workers (CHWs) are in a strong position to support both older adults and the people who care for them. This article explores practical tools and resources that CHWs can use to promote healthy aging, while also building a support system for caregivers.

CHWs can connect older adults and their caregivers with services, support, and educational resources to enhance their health and wellbeing. Research shows that when older adults with multiple health issues are supported by CHWs, outcomes such as mood, function, medication understanding, and quality of life can improve ⁴. CHWs' involvement helps bridge the gap between formal health or service systems and older adults in their homes or communities ⁷. For caregivers, CHW support can mean helping to navigate service systems, locate relevant supports, and share information in understandable ways ⁵.

With this foundation, CHWs can take active steps to support older adults and their caregivers through practical, everyday actions. Below are strategies for CHWs that can be adapted and used in different settings:



Promoting Physical Wellbeing & Function

- Encourage older adults to engage in regular physical activity: the federal resource ["Move Your Way" provides fact sheets and tools](#) for older adults ⁶.
- Help with exercises that improve balance and strength, which reduce risk of falls. For example, home-based strength/balance exercises can be part of routine check-ins.
- Assist in reviewing medication use, ensuring prescriptions are taken correctly, and encouraging older adults and caregivers to ask clinicians about potential side effects or interactions ³.



Supporting Nutrition and Daily Living Routines

- Use the [dietary guidance specific to older adults](#) (per U.S. Dietary Guidelines) to discuss healthy eating patterns with older adults and their caregivers ⁶.
- Conduct simple home safety checks (e.g., lighting, tripping hazards, railings) and refer or coordinate with services that can help with modification; this supports the client's ability to remain independent.
- Share strategies for caregivers to build routines (mealtimes, hydration, medication reminders) that support older adults' stability and reduce caregiver stress.



Strengthening Caregiver Support

- Provide caregivers with resource lists: local agencies, homebased services, respite options, support groups. CHWs can compile updated local directories.
- Facilitate peer support or group check-ins (either in person or virtually) among caregivers to share practical tips and reduce isolation.
- Encourage caregivers to also attend to their own wellbeing: sleep, stress management, taking short breaks, asking for help when needed.



Facilitating Social Engagement and Purpose

- Older adults who remain engaged in meaningful activity, connection and routines tend to report better wellbeing. The “activity theory” of aging suggests that staying active and connected can support life satisfaction ⁹.
- CHWs can help by linking older adults to local clubs, classes, volunteer opportunities (as appropriate), technology-training for staying connected, and community events.
- Encourage caregiver-and-older adult joint activities (walking together, hobbies, shared tasks) which can strengthen relationships and make the caring role more sustainable.

Maximizing CHW Impact

To maximize the impact of CHWs, it is essential that programs and supervisors offer well-designed training and supportive tools. Health centers must ensure CHWs receive proper training focused on working with older adults, especially around issues common in this population (memory loss, fall risk, functional decline, etc.). For example, one training in Oklahoma focused on dementia care for CHWs in order to enhance their readiness to support older adults ⁸.

In addition to formal training, CHWs benefit from practical tools that can guide their day-to-day work. Programs can develop simple job aids such as home visit checklists covering topics like mobility, medication use, nutrition, and caregiver needs. Referral flow charts and caregiver tip sheets can also support consistency and clarity in communication.

Creating opportunities for CHWs to learn from one another is another key element. Peer-learning forums—whether in person or virtual—allow CHWs to exchange real-life examples of what has worked in the home setting, how they’ve successfully engaged caregivers, and how they’ve adapted strategies when faced with limited resources.



Practical Considerations for CHWs and Programs

- Prioritize building relationships: trust is key for older adults and caregivers to accept support, share concerns, and engage in discussions about daily routines and wellbeing.
- Tailor approaches based on the older adult's functional status, living situation and caregiver capacity: home visits vs telephone check-ins vs group sessions each have merits.
- Monitor and document outcomes: track measures such as number of home visits, referrals made, caregiver satisfaction, changes in older adult mobility or medication adherence. As one review noted, CHW-led programs for older adults had mixed but promising results—particularly for mood and function ⁴.
- Leverage collaborations: CHWs can work alongside clinicians, social service agencies and older adult programs to coordinate supports. Programs that link older adults to CHWs show improved care coordination ².
- Focus on sustainability: For CHW-led efforts to endure, integrate tools into existing workflows, ensure manageable caseloads, provide ongoing supervision and feedback, and advocate for recognition of the role within the broader care system.

Resource Summary for CHWs



- **Fact sheets/tools:** Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (ODPHP) “Move Your Way” materials for older adults ⁶: <https://odphp.health.gov/our-work/nutrition-physical-activity/move-your-way-community-resources/campaign-materials/materials-older-adults>
- **Training guide:** Alzheimer’s Association “Community Health Workers Resource Guide to Healthy Aging and Addressing Dementia” ¹: <https://www.alz.org/getmedia/01534d07-e0fb-470d-b2d3-747f6afcfda2/community-health-workers-a-resource-for-healthy-aging-and-addressing-dementia.pdf>
- **Program examples:** Center for Health Care Strategies document on CHW programs supporting older adults ²: <https://www.chcs.org/resource-center/community-health-worker-programs-supporting-older-adults/>
- **Implementation tip sheet:** Reliable article on CHW and caregiver linking ⁵: <https://nashp.org/community-health-workers-and-family-caregivers-opportunities-to-enhance-connection-with-community-resources-for-aging-populations-and-families/>

Conclusion

CHWs play a vital role in supporting older adults and their caregivers, especially when equipped with practical tools, training, and links to relevant services. By promoting physical wellbeing, supporting nutrition and routines, strengthening caregiver resilience, fostering social connection, and employing structured training and tools, CHWs can help older adults maintain function, meaning and enjoyment in later life. Programs that build these support strategies not only benefit older adults and caregivers now but can also help create sustainable systems of care for the future.

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