

# COVID-19 Trainings for Community Health Workers

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Across the country, community health workers (CHWs) have become an essential part of healthcare. As community members themselves, CHWs connect community members with health services they need. They bring “relatability” to healthcare and health information, says Kim Jay, training manager and senior community health worker at Sinai Urban Health Institute (SUHI) in Chicago, IL.

When the [Chicagoland CEAL \(Community Engagement Alliance\) Program](#) heard from leaders of community-based organizations that the best way to share information about COVID-19 and the vaccine with community members was through trusted messengers, CHWs immediately came to mind.

“Community health workers are a unique group of people who have insights on health processes, familiarity with the healthcare system, and expertise as part of the communities they serve and support,” says Adlaide Holloway, senior community health educator and training facilitator at Sinai Urban Health Institute (SUHI). Equipped with evidence-based and reliable information, this workforce provides a powerful way to address health inequities. The team decided to offer free, virtual trainings with up-to-date information on COVID-19 and vaccines as well as other tools to support CHWs in their work

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The team developed two types of trainings which have been offered in English and Spanish since December 2021. The top priority during the pandemic was to get out reliable

information about COVID-19 and vaccines, so the first session, called COVID-19 101, provides community health workers with the tools, knowledge, and skills needed to increase vaccine confidence and assist clients with COVID-19 related concerns. “The information equips CHWs to have conversations so community members can make decisions and explore barriers or concerns they have about getting the vaccine,” Holloway says.

The second session, Introduction to Community Health Work, helps experienced and new community health workers develop essential skills to facilitate their COVID-19–related activities as well as their community health work more broadly. The content includes techniques like motivational interviewing and a look at how history and past healthcare experiences can affect how members of underserved communities feel about seeking healthcare or participating in research.

The interactive trainings also offer a space for community health workers to connect with one another and share their experiences. The trainings start with a meditation to let CHWs slow down their fast-paced days and tune into the information, themselves, and each other. The trainers also set expectations, letting CHWs know that they can participate in the way that makes them most comfortable, camera on or off, speaking up or using the chat, whichever works best for them. Showing care and consideration of CHWs and cultivating community is an important part of the effectiveness of the training, Holloways says. “Some of the most awesome parts are at the end, when participants share out information and connect with one another.”

Upon completion of the trainings, attendees have the opportunity for ongoing learning support via office hours offered by SUHI’s [Center for CHW Research, Outcomes, & Workforce Development \(CROWD\)](#). “It’s so important that they have the tools in their toolkit to assist their community members to the best of their ability and still be able to lean back on the place that trained them for additional support,” Jay stated. “It is really great to be able to support them full circle.”

So far, 265 people have completed the trainings. While most have been in the Chicago area, CHWs from as far away as California have signed up and participated. Participants include both experienced CHWs and those new to the field. More than two-thirds have given feedback on the training through a post-training evaluation, and the reviews have been positive.

The Chicagoland CEAL team is looking ahead for ways to build on their success and at moving to a “train the trainer” model to expand their impact among CHWs and the communities they serve. “The best way to see your impact is if somebody can carry the same message that you shared,” says Jay. “The newly trained trainers can take advantage of what they learned and teach the next blossoming community health worker.”



**Topic(s):** [Community-Specific Health Disparities](#)

**Program:** [Community Engagement Alliance Regional Teams](#)