

2026 Community Health Worker Profile 2:

WORKFORCE EDUCATION, TRAINING AND WAGES



Community Health Workers (CHWs) are frontline health workers with a close and trusted relationship with the communities they serve.

They work in healthcare and community services and under a variety of job titles including, health educator, patient navigator, outreach worker and care coordinator. In Montana, the Community Health Representative (CHR) program, a founding CHW program through Indian Health Services has been around since 1968.

CHWs Rely on Rapid Trainings More Than Formal Educational Pathways

A Shared Foundation:
Montana-based CHW training has reached 85% of the workforce.

There are four trainings in Montana that are recognized by colleges and/or the federal government: I.H.S. Community Health Representative Training, University of Montana CCFWD CHW Training, MT ORH/AHEC CHW Training, and the Salish Kootenai College CHW training.

15% of those who identify as a CHW have not taken an official CHW training course. CHW training through Montana high education institutions takes less than 6 months.

Between the Universities, more than 600 individuals have been trained as CHWs.



Career Pathways in Action:
82% of CHWs have received a second license or certification. The most common include:

Behavioral Health Peer Support Specialists (15%)
Family Peer Support Specialists (14%)
Targeted Case Management (10%)
Doula or Birth worker (7.5%)
EMS Worker (7.5%)
Certified Nursing Assistant (7.5%)
Crisis Worker (7.5%)
Community Integrated Health (6%)
Prevention Specialist (5%)

Other licensures, certifications and titles also include (non-exhaustive list): Licensed Professional Nurse, Medical Assistant, Licensed Addiction Counselor, SHIP counselor, and tenancy support specialist. This demonstrates the need to consider workforce and reimbursement strategies that align across these workforces.

CHWs Expand the Healthcare Workforce by Creating Accessible Pathways into Health Careers for Adults with Diverse Educational Backgrounds

More than half of Montana CHWs do not hold a four-year college degree, yet they play an essential role in improving community health. More than 1/3 of surveyed CHWs do not hold a two or four-year college degree. Among those with college credentials: 16% have an associate degree, 34% have a bachelors degree and 13% have a masters degree.

The CHW workforce is predominantly made up of working-age adults pursuing nontraditional pathways into healthcare.

Nearly all respondents (97%) were older than 24, suggesting many CHWs enter the field through workforce training, lived experience and community-based career pathways rather than traditional healthcare education routes.

- **24%** of respondents are **ages 25-34**
- **27.5%** of respondents are **ages 35-44**
- **24%** of respondents are **ages 45-54**
- **16%** of respondents are **ages 55-64**
- **5%** of respondents are **65 or older**



76% of CHWs are over the age of 35 and 21% are 55+

CHW wages: A wide range reflecting the variety of jobs and employers

CHWs have a broad scope of practice (MTCHWA Policy Manual) that includes health education; case management; coaching support; building individual and community capacity; conducting outreach; implementing individual and community assessments; direct service; and participating in evaluation and research. This scope of work enables them to work in a variety of job titles in a broad range of organizations that improve community health.

While the most common job title for CHWs surveyed was the title of a 'community health worker' (22.5%), CHWs surveyed operated under 45 other job titles.

The most common job titles included: Care Coordinator (9%); Case Manager (5%); Outreach Worker (5%); Health Educator (4%). Most other job titles had 2 or less respondents per each, some of those titles included: Behavioral Health Care Manager; Community Health Advocate; Community Outreach Director; Prevention Specialist; Doula; Tenancy Support Specialist; Public Health Manager; Family Navigator; SHIP counselor; and Targeted Case Manager.

CHWs, as reflected by the variety of titles and organizations they work within, have a broad salary range.

Over 50% of CHWs earn \$18- \$25 an hour, and 30% of CHWs earn between \$26-\$35 an hour. A small number of CHWs (12.5%) earn less than \$18 an hour, and 5% earn more than \$36 an hour.

Compared to other healthcare careers, CHWs earn less than the average healthcare wage (\$67,000) and less than the average wage of all careers in Montana (\$60,000).

(*January 2026, Montana 406 Jobs Sector Analysis, Montana Department of Labor and Industry).

