



Umbrella Multicultural Health Co-op

# CROSS CULTURAL HEALTH BROKERS: A MODEL FOR ADVANCING HEALTH EQUITY

## RESEARCH BRIEF

Cross Cultural Health Brokers (CCHB) work to meet the unique health and wellness needs of Canada's ethnically diverse and multilingual population. According to the 2016 Canadian Census, one in five persons in Canada is foreign born and more than 70% of immigrants reported a language other than English or French as their mother tongue (1). Many newcomers to Canada face language, cultural and other barriers to health that contribute to health inequities (2,3). Indeed, a trend known as the "healthy immigrant effect" describes how immigrant health deteriorates over time, despite generally arriving to Canada with higher than average health status (4).

The CCHB Model promotes health and wellness equity for ethno-cultural communities along the full continuum of settlement, integration, and social inclusion. There is conclusive evidence for the effectiveness of community health workers to improve health outcomes for marginalized populations, address the social determinants of health, and advance health equity (2, 5, 6). Research also suggests that community health workers can reduce health care costs because of their focus on primary care, health promotion, and disease prevention (5). The CCHB model is therefore an important strategy to strengthen the health care and social systems and fulfil on a number of Health Canada's primary objectives, namely: to ensure efficient and accessible health services and to reduce health inequalities in Canadian society (7).

### ROLE OF CROSS CULTURAL HEALTH BROKER

Cultural brokering is the act of linking and bridging individuals of different cultures for the purpose of producing change (8). Since the 1960s, CCHBs have acted as relational bridges between community members and formal systems to improve health outcomes (9). They work with individuals, families, and communities to access medical services, social services, and health promotion activities while supporting the relationship between patients, family doctors, and others. The role of a CCHB, therefore, includes improving access to culturally appropriate services (10). CCHBs also demonstrate a unique ability to address the social determinants of health (5, 10). They have a deep understanding of issues faced by their communities and employ a holistic approach to promoting health.

### Why "CCHB"?

Cross Cultural Health Brokers (CCHB) fall under the broader term 'Community Health Workers' (CHW), and can also be referred to as:

- multicultural health brokers
- community navigators
- peer educators
- lay health educators
- and others

### CCHB or Interpreter...what is the difference?

Similar to Interpreters, CCHBs assist patients to access services in their own language. However, the CCHB role extends to:

- Advocating with & on behalf of patients, clients, and their families (9)
- Intervening in conflict situations (8)
- Innovating when traditions are inflexible (8)
- Bridging value systems (8)
- Improving system navigation (5)
- Connecting individuals with services that address social determinants of health (10)

# THE IMPACT OF THE CCHB MODEL



## IMPROVED HEALTH OUTCOMES

CCHB interventions can improve health & influence health promoting behaviour in areas such as: health screening, diabetes and asthma management, healthy heart lifestyle, maternal and child health services, healthy eating habits, blood pressure reduction, patient enrolment in research, child development, and health care utilization (2, 5, 6).

## GREATER HEALTH EQUITY

The Public Health Agency of Canada states that addressing health disparities will improve the health of all society (12). Torres et al. call for a "systematic approach to health equity" in which community health workers play a vital role (11).

## REDUCE HEALTH CARE COSTS

CCHBs explain the health care system to community members, making it less likely for patients to delay seeking care and utilize or misuse emergency services (5). Health promotion and disease prevention led by CCHBs keep individuals healthier over the life course. Reducing the health care needs of vulnerable groups can decrease cost and reduce pressure on the delivery of health services (12).

## SUPPORT FOR THE CCHB MODEL

There is a growing body of evidence that suggests CCHBs are an "under-recognized and underutilized" public health workforce that has the potential to mitigate barriers to accessing health care services and to reduce health inequities (5). As such, researchers are calling for greater integration of community health workers within the broader health and social services systems (2, 5, 11). The CCHB model is therefore a proven strategy to strengthen the capacity of health and social systems to better serve newcomer and other marginalized groups.

## RECOMMENDATION:

**To support the implementation and expansion of the CCHB model and encourage the integration of CCHBs into the mainstream health care and social systems.**

### CCHB from Umbrella Co-op, New Westminster, BC:

**"We fill a huge gap for newcomers that I felt when I first arrived to Canada. Even though I'm a physician in my home country and speak English, adjusting to my new life here was filled with uncertainty, including how to access health care.**

**I feel solidarity with our patients, and understand on a personal level when I see the relief in their face when we bridge our health service to their language and culture."**

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