

How the Office of Healthy Communities Uses E-learning to Train Community Health Workers

Summary

The Office of Healthy Communities (OHC) in the Washington State Department of Health faced a daunting task: create a program from scratch to train up to 500 community health workers a year across the state. The purpose was to meet recommendations from the Affordable Care Act and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. They met the challenge and dramatically expanded their workforce with a flexible training program that combines traditional on-site sessions with a progressive online learning management system. OHC now has a growing network of 400 health workers across the state — including in hard-to-access rural areas. They share this training with over 100 agencies.

Challenge

Administrators and staff were challenged with starting a brand new program that could provide statewide training for community health workers (CHW). They knew that the potential audience was diverse, widely dispersed, and inconsistently trained. Some participants lived in cities and some in the most rural areas of the state. All of the participants had to navigate busy work schedules to earn 30 hours of continuing education.

Solution

OHC administrators wanted to accommodate the varying needs of working adults with a more flexible learning system. With this in mind, they turned to a curriculum developed by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and the e-learning development firm Talance, Inc. The program was created to increase the capacity for professional development of community health workers through online courses. The aim was for participants to attend training that would show them how to help clients take charge of their health, reducing the need for additional care. In October 2012, Washington State began implementing its own version of the program.



What it is all about

Both the Office of Healthy Communities and participants in the program benefit by using a mix of online learning and standard in-person classroom instruction. As an experienced instructor in the Office of Healthy Communities, Debbie Spink says that the in-person sessions bring participants to the same foundational level. At the start of online classes, they know more and interact better with peers. Conversations begun together about best practices and cultural differences continue to expand and deepen through online assignments and forum discussions. The in-person meeting at the end of the program feels like a celebration but also lets participants chat about the skills they developed and practice what they have learned.

Results

The Office of Healthy Communities put together the best elements of in-person training with the best of online training to implement a blended learning model. OHC allows its network of facilitators around Washington to supplement a brief live session with an in-depth online course containing assignments, assessments tools, and service coordination skills. The training model is efficient, lean, and scalable, allowing it to meet funding variables and limitations. It makes training fast and easy, which can be difficult in Washington. It is a large state with rural pockets not easily accessible for traditional in-person learning programs.

Over the course of eight weeks, students participate in 30 hours of Core Competency Training including Cultural Competency, communication skills, and CHW roles and boundaries. Health Specific Modules include Pre-Diabetes/Diabetes & Hypertension, Cardiovascular Health, Understanding Disparities & Social Determinants of Health among other topics.

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"I loved the online training course, especially how easy it was to navigate. I learned many new things that I have already started using on a daily basis. It was very easy to learn and I absolutely loved that we could do it on our own time and not a fixed schedule. "

- CHW Student

Sustainable Success

Today, more than 400 have graduated from the program. This number is projected to exceed 500 by the end of the year. "The blended structure is one reason for the popularity and success of program. Learners don't need to have anything special to participate besides access to a computer and the Internet," says Spink. Community health workers can participate in one of seven regional core skills courses and take one of eight health-specific programs. A program that began as presentation-based staff training delivered ad hoc at employer sites, has evolved into a consistent statewide program that educates hundreds of people through audio, video, and discussion boards.

For more information about the CHW training program visit <http://www.doh.wa.gov/chwts>.



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Training Curriculum for
Community Health Workers



MANUAL FOR IN-PERSON AND ONLINE TRAINING