

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

About the Whatcom Community Health Worker (CHW) Initiative

General Questions

How are you defining “Community Health Worker”?

The Initiative is based on the CHW definition from the American Public Health Association:

“[A community health worker is] ...a frontline public health worker who is a trusted member of and/or has an unusually close understanding of the community served.

This trusting relationship enables the worker to serve as a liaison/link/intermediary between health/social services and the community.”

The Whatcom CHW Initiative includes any person in a CHW-like role, even if they aren’t called CHWs. They might be called a community health representative, lay health worker, promotor/promotora, community health advocate, outreach worker, navigator, or something similar.

What is your long-term vision or goal?

- 1) To create a county-wide CHW Network to support CHWs in their work.
- 2) To be a partner in a CHW Project with the Latino community in Sumas, Everson, and Nooksack
- 3) To ensure there is communication and coordination with other CHW efforts across the region and state, including training, program development, and policy work.

What is the Initiative doing?

The Initiative has two main strategies: Creating a county-wide **CHW Network** and developing a **CHW Project** in the Sumas, Everson, Nooksack area.

- 1) The **CHW Network** started in April 2018. It brings CHWs together to get to know each other, share the work they’re doing, and support each other. WAHA’s goal is to support CHWs in deciding what kind of support and action will be the most useful to them. The Network meets monthly at different members’ locations; for information on upcoming meetings, please visit whatcomalliance.org/chw/.
- 2) The **CHW Project** is working on identifying trusted community members/natural helpers in the Latino community in Sumas, Everson, and Nooksack. WAHA is also learning about community assets, needs and priorities through a series of community gatherings in April and May 2018, as well as continuing to develop partnerships with the Nooksack Valley School District, churches, community organizations, and businesses. How the Project develops will depend on community members’ interests and priorities, and where the needs and opportunities are.

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Questions about WAHA's CHW Assessment

These questions are about WAHA's Whatcom County CHW Assessment Report.

You can read the full [Assessment Report](#) or the 2-page [Executive Summary](#).

What conclusions came out of the assessment?

- 1) Whatcom County has numerous organizations with staff that do some aspect of CHW work. However, the CHW role is defined in a lot of different ways. There is little communication or coordination among CHWs, and no local structure to support them.
 - **Creating the Whatcom CHW Network is a response to this opportunity.**
- 2) It's valuable to focus on the Latino population in Sumas, Everson, and Nooksack because they have more barriers to health and social services, and worse health status than other populations ([Community Health Needs Assessment](#)). The Nooksack Valley School District (which encompasses Sumas, Everson, and Nooksack and surrounding areas) is very community-oriented and is interested in exploring partnering on a CHW project.
 - **The CHW Project is a response to this opportunity.**
- 3) The Whatcom CHW Initiative needs to be coordinated with county, regional, and state organizations involved with CHW training, program development, and/or health care reform.

Why is the focus only on the Latino community in Sumas, Everson and Nooksack?

Several community health assessments completed by the Health Department, PeaceHealth St Joseph Medical Center, and others show that in Whatcom County, rural communities and Latinos have more barriers to health and social services, and worse health status than other populations.

Sumas, Everson, and Nooksack are BOTH rural AND have the county's highest percent of Latino population (19% based on ZIP code data; 32% of school district enrollees).

Also, working with a smaller population will make the project more manageable, and allow WAHA to dedicate the time and resources that it takes to create a project that's truly community-based.

As the work unfolds, the focus may expand or change to include additional communities.

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What are the primary opportunities for [CHW] workforce development?

These organizations all have an interest in developing CHWs.

- WA State Department of Health's CHW training program
- Area Health Education Center for Western Washington
- North Sound Accountable Community of Health
- Foundation for Healthy Generations

At this time, the Washington Department of Health is the only entity in Washington State with a [CHW training program](#) in place.

How can your work be replicated across counties/populations?

We aren't sure yet. But we are excited about working with others to figure out the best ways to share what we learn.

What plans are in place for sustainable network funding?

Currently, WAHA's work on this Initiative is funded by the Chuckanut Health Foundation, United Way of Whatcom County, Whatcom Community Foundation, and PeaceHealth St. Joseph Medical Center. WAHA will continue to seek long-term, sustainable funding for the Whatcom County CHW Initiative. We hope to receive support from the Foundation for Healthy Generations, the North Sound Accountable Community of Health, and others.

How will differences across CHW partners be resolved and/or coordinated?

Like any new Initiative or project, WAHA and other partners will need to address differences as they come up. Some may be conflicts, some may be opportunities! There is not a master plan or "formula" for this work. We trust that together we will be able to find solutions to the challenges that are encountered along the way.

How would the CHW Network be different from other organizations that exist?

WAHA's intent isn't to create a new organization, but to bring together the people and programs that are already doing CHW work. We want to provide more connection and coordination so that our efforts are stronger. And we want CHWs to be recognized for their important work and have a way to say what they need and want.