

Medicus Mundi Switzerland Bulletin
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Community Health Workers (working title)
Deadline: 20 May 2022
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Community Health Workers and Health Systems Strengthening (working title)

Dear Colleagues

It is not only the Covid-19 pandemic that has brought increasing worldwide awareness of the importance of community health workers (**CHWs**). As well as contributing to improving a population's health, CHWs can also speed up the implementation of universal health coverage (UHC) around the globe.

Community health workers are not a new concept: they have long played an important role in the strengthening of many countries' health systems. However, with the increasing global shortage of professional care and nursing staff, as well as the current pandemic and the associated setbacks in hard-won achievements in the healthcare sector, the deployment of CHWs is gaining a new significance.

In many rural areas around the world, CHWs are often the first point of contact in the event of an illness and they act as a link between the official health system and the communities. Although they have less training than professional care workers, CHWs perform – as has been recognised by the WHO – a range of important primary healthcare services, from disease prevention and education to antenatal consultations and malaria screenings. And, since they are recruited from their own communities, CHWs often enjoy a great level of trust among the population.

Exact figures are unavailable but it is estimated that 7.2 million CHWs are currently serving their communities. However, most of them do not receive adequate support from their governments. They suffer poor working conditions, are underpaid or work for no pay at all, and there are only limited training opportunities or financial incentives to enhance the quality of their work and the delivery of necessary health services.

Already in 2018, the WHO published a guideline with evidence-based recommendations that support health policies and systems in LMICs in the initiation or improvement of programmes for community health workers. Key factors in the implementation of these recommendations include the need to define the role of CHWs in relation to other healthcare workers, planning for the health workforce as a whole and integrating CHW programmes appropriately.

In this MMS Bulletin, we would like to discuss the potential of community health workers with a focus on middle and low-income countries (LMICs). Are CHWs pioneers in the strengthening of health systems and achieving health for all? Can this workforce compensate for the shortage of health workers? Which challenges and deficits exist in the health policies of many countries and which measures should be introduced (best practice examples) so that the potential of CHWs can be fully developed?

Some key questions from our point of view:

- Community health programmes are essential for achieving UHC and for the strengthening of health systems. What role do CHWs play in this?
- What difficulties and challenges are CHWs facing when delivering their services?
- Which structural, social and conceptual barriers are preventing a better integration of CHWs into healthcare systems?
- Are CHWs a model for the future or just a substitute for professional health workers?
- Which political measures are required to ensure CHWs are better integrated into their respective health systems? What are pioneering models for integration?
- To what extent can the WHO and its adopted guidelines advance this process?
- How do you see your role as an NGO in this process?
- Please share your experiences.

References:

- WHO 2018. WHO guideline on health policy and system support to optimize community health worker programmes. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241550369>

We would like to ask you to send a short outline (title and two or three sentences) to us as soon as possible so we can define the form and scope of your contribution with you.

Requirements:

The MMS Bulletin is the Swiss online journal for international cooperation and health. It is an online journal which is published four times a year. To keep our journal of high quality we would like you to follow the following guidelines for submission:

- Your article can be written in **English, German or French**
- Text length: 5,000 – 10,000 characters (2 to 3 pages only)
- **Title and subtitle:** please provide an appealing title incl. a subtitle
- **Lead text:** up to 100 words – text in bold
- References: Please use Harvard Reference Style [In-text citations: "I used to be..." (Fitzgerald, 2004). Reference Lists: Fitzgerald, F. (2004). The great Gatsby. New York: Scribner.]
- Author affiliations: please provide a short description about the author incl. a photograph
- **Please provide some photos in high resolution and in jpg. format.** Please include a caption and the name of the photographer
- **Copy Deadline: 20 May 2022**
- Please review previous MMS Bulletin:

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