



## Promoting Health Care for America's Underserved Developing Tomorrow's Health Care Workforce

### What is Community HealthCorps?

Founded in 1995 by the National Association of Community Health Centers, Community HealthCorps is the largest health-focused, national AmeriCorps program that promotes health care for America's underserved, while developing tomorrow's health care workforce. The mission is to improve health care access and enhance workforce development through community health center sponsored AmeriCorps including VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America), and related programs.

Overarching goals to address the needs of medically underserved and other vulnerable populations served by community health centers are as follows:

- Increase access to and utilization of primary and preventive health care.
- Improve the capacity of health centers to provide quality and preventable health care services.
- Increase the quality and availability of preventive and primary care services and programs.
- Foster collaborations and partnerships that ensure the continuity and sustainability of programs and services.
- Encourage Community HealthCorps Members to pursue further education and careers in community health through mentorship and experiential learning.
- Create a culture of civic engagement and volunteerism to strengthen preventive and primary health care.

Community HealthCorps program sponsors are primarily community health centers (CHCs) and primary care associations (PCAs) that host one or more teams of HealthCorps Members. Operating since 2001, Community HealthCorps\*VISTA is comprised of project stations (sponsors) - predominantly CHCs, PCAs and hospitals that typically host one or two VISTA Members. Most Members enroll for a full year of service, and many serve for two terms of service. Nearly 500 Community HealthCorps Members serve through partner organizations in 19 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

### Members Reflect and Work in Underserved Communities

Members serve rural and racially/culturally diverse urban communities and suburban, as well as migrant farm worker, homeless and public housing populations. Members are as racially, ethnically and economically diverse as the communities they serve. Educational attainment varies from high school and some college to graduate degrees. In addition, some Members are active or retired health and social service professionals. No matter their background, Members become part of a community's struggle for better health and economic independence.

### Members are Highly Trained

Members acquire new skills and knowledge that enhance their effectiveness and value to patients and other individuals through pre-service orientation, in-service and advanced trainings. Training is conducted by health center staff, national program staff, and others with subject matter expertise. VISTAs receive NACHC-organized, special training in grant proposal writing, other resource development and a variety of leadership skills using the LeadershipPlenty® curriculum.



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## Members are known as “Agents of Change”

Community HealthCorps State and National Members perform a variety of activities associated with health services and programs for patients and communities, often by functioning as community health workers (CHWs). Examples of activities:

- Navigating the health care system;
- Helping people in need establish a “medical home”, and improve utilization of health services;
- Individual and group health promotion/disease prevention education;
- Adopting “self-care” practices that lead to improved health status;
- Follow-up, case management, and support on treatment plans;
- Enrollment in public health insurance; and
- Assessing other patient needs (financial assistance, housing, legal, etc.).

Focused on indirect services, Community HealthCorps\*VISTA Members alleviate poverty by improving the capacity of health centers to provide quality health services and programs to medically underserved people.

Examples of activities:

- Needs assessment;
- Resource generation (funding, volunteers, and partners);
- Strategic planning and health promotion program improvement;
- Development of volunteer management systems; and
- Assisting in implementation of health information technology.

## An Effective Model for Health Care Delivery and Capacity Building

Referred to by many names, employed and volunteer community health workers (CHWs) have various long-standing roles in the United States and worldwide, but all strive to positively impact the health and well-being of communities they serve. Research indicates that community health workers are particularly effective at:

- Increasing access to health services;
- Increasing knowledge about a variety of health issues;
- Facilitating behavior change; and
- Providing social support and culturally competent, cost-effective care for medically underserved populations.

## Key Program Accomplishments for 2008-09

**Members assisted 746,803** medically underserved people who lacked access and inadequately used preventive and primary health care services and programs. **Members enrolled 77,472** of the people served in health screenings, group health education workshops and classes, health insurance plans, and other health services and programs. Lastly, **75,028** of the people **used preventive and primary health care services** and programs two or more times within the program year.

**Members recruited and coordinated 5,880 volunteers** that served 33,595 hours to assist health centers and other community-based organizations with addressing health and human needs. Of these volunteers, 806 were baby boomers (born on or before 1945), 458 were disadvantaged children and 1,141 were college students.

National Director – Jason Patnosh

For more information about the Community HealthCorps, visit us online at: <http://www.communityhealthcorps.org>