

Community Health Workers and Promotores

CAREER PATHWAY

INITIATIVE

El Sol's career pathway initiative promotes and upholds the identity, recognition, personal and professional growth of the Community Health Worker/Promotor (CHW/P), regardless of educational degree and title/position. The CHW/P identity embodies the essence of what makes a strong CHW/P, a chosen member of the community who demonstrates fiercely spirited and community-driven leadership and commitment to make a difference in their communities. The CHW/P is a trusted leader who maintains strong ties with their community and does their job best by meeting people where they are. We believe in the upward mobility and personal and professional advancement of CHWs/Ps. It is vital to understand that career advancement should never proceed from an assumption that a position as a CHW/P is the first step to another profession.

At the [El Sol CHW/P Training Center](#), we continue to uphold the CHW/P profession, we are confident there are countless opportunities for growth and learning, including but not limited to:

- **Leadership roles**  
(supervision and mentorship)
- **Evaluation roles**  
(support evaluation team in the design and development of surveys and questionnaires, and culturally relevant techniques to collect, analyze, interpret, and disseminate data)
- **Training and development roles**  
(train other CHWs/Ps on how to facilitate and deliver stronger training and workshops and contribute to ongoing curriculum development).
- **Advocacy and policy roles**  
(representing CHWs/Ps and community at different levels to advocate for change)



We are strong advocates for growing CHW's/P's career path and compensating with a competitive salary to support their families and themselves. In addition, this improves retention and satisfaction and drives the change in the delivery system. For example, an interpreter deserves a higher level of compensation when they are actually providing interpretation or translation of written documents.

Incorporating CHWs/Ps in other areas/ roles will allow them to co-design, co-train, help with implementation, support supervisory roles, provide feedback, and discuss areas for improvement with other team members. This transformational strategy will benefit our communities.



As CHWs/Ps grow professionally (in their skills, knowledge, and confidence), they will discover their niches while simultaneously serving as trustworthy companions in transforming policies, systems, and environments to achieve more positive outcomes for the people they serve, and their surrounding communities.

**Developing, embracing, and promoting this initiative is integral so that CHWs/Ps are respected as equals by other public health professionals and are considered as such by key stakeholders.**

Implementing this career pathway initiative is fundamental in the commitment to social justice, health equity, systems change, and empowering model.

The graphic below demonstrates the career pathway opportunities of advanced roles within the CHW/P profession.



### Core CHW/P characteristics in all positions

- Community loyalty
- Cultural humility and sensitivity
- Lives in the community
- Seeks social justice and health equity

91%

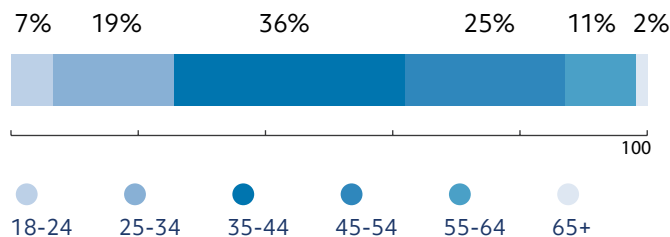
of CHWs/Ps believe there is a need to have a clear career pathway in place within the CHW/P field.<sup>[1]</sup>



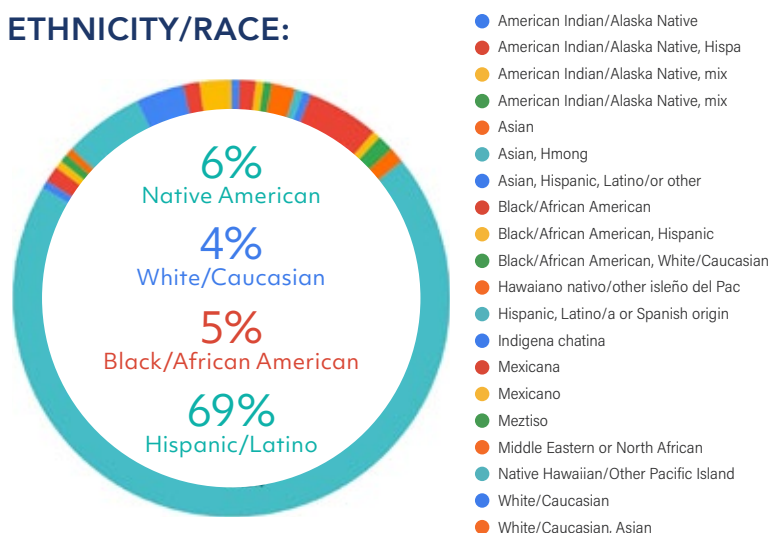
## WHAT ARE CHWS/PS SAYING?

El Sol CHW/P Training Center conducted a multi-state survey of 169 CHWs/Ps with questions related to career advancement within the CHW field in order to better understand CHWs/Ps' career needs and goals in developing a career pathway. Overall, most CHWs would like to advance professionally as a CHW if the opportunity were given, rather than transition to other fields, such as nursing or social work. Below are the demographics of the participants and their answers.

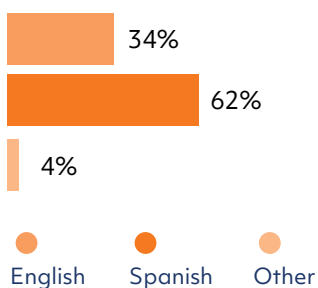
### AGES:



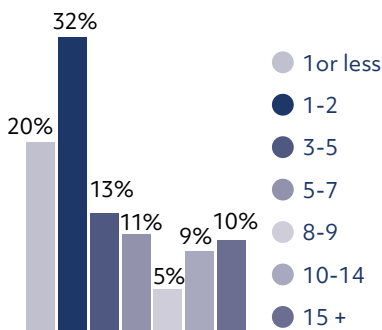
### ETHNICITY/RACE:



### PRIMARY LANGUAGE:

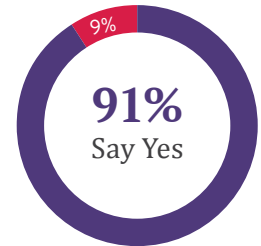


### YEARS OF EXPERIENCE:

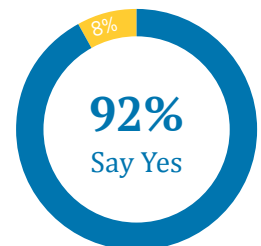


## SURVEY RESULTS:

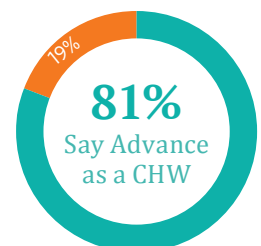
Do you believe there is a need for CHWs to have a clear career pathway in place within the CHW field?



Do you believe the CHWs career should maintain their own identity and not be confused with other professions?



If there is an opportunity to advance professionally as a CHW, would you prefer to advance professionally as a CHW or transition to new fields like nursing, social work or other?



Which of the following CHW opportunities would you like to pursue as a CHW (if the opportunity is available)?

CHW/P as a:

- Evaluation Team
- Others
- Supervisor
- Mentorship



## PURPOSE:

# CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHWS/PS

This initiative aims to elevate, incentivize, and enhance the CHW/P workforce, to offer growth and advancement, personally and professionally, including a competitive salary, without losing the essence and identity of a CHW/P.

How can we create stronger opportunities for CHW/Ps?

El Sol CHW/P Training Center has created a career advancement pathway through:

- A customized training curriculum using Popular Education methodology.
- CHW/P practice and expand their skillsets in different settings (individual, interpersonal, community, health, policy and environment) following the socio-ecological model.
- A CHW/P career advancement guide, which includes roles, requirements, core competence, experience required, salary average, and training recommendations.

Our goal is for CHWs/Ps to hone in on their natural abilities, identify their niches, and look for opportunities for growth within the profession. For example, a CHW/P may discover they have a niche for facilitation and coaching, and can influence other CHWs/Ps to do the same when they train and lead workshops out in the community. Others might discover they enjoy supervising and mentoring their team to achieve goals.



# WHO IS AND WHO IS NOT A CHW/PROMOTOR/A?

In recent years, there has been a debate about transitioning CHWs/Ps into other careers (such as Nursing, Social Work, Medicine, etc.). There is an assumption that CHW/P positions are primarily stepping stones to other health-related occupations and/or entry-level positions. CHWs/Ps also are viewed as only effective when working with low-income populations and marginalized communities. This myth must be demystified as CHWs/Ps are capable to participate in more roles that will strengthen and expand the capacity of the healthcare, behavioral health and public health systems to address systematic and structural needs in ways that can improve community wellbeing and health outcomes.



An individual's choice to pursue a career as a CHW/ must be respected and honored. Stakeholders should be careful not to create hierarchical (totem pole) distinctions between CHWs/Ps bound for other careers and those who wish to remain as CHWs/Ps. Instead stakeholders should provide intentional and ongoing support for the CHW's/P's career path.

The unique career pathway of a CHW/P must be attributed to their life experiences and deep understanding of the roots, history and richness that make up their neighborhoods including the troubles, barriers, hesitation to access health and social service systems, and community transformation. The CHW/P must not be confused with other helping or public health professionals as their expertise comes from lifelong learning.

While CHWs/Ps can wear many hats and carry out different roles, because they are multiskilled professionals who support community members, contribute to care teams and systems in different capacities including: outreach, health education, training, informal coaching, supervision, policy, evaluation etc. It is important not to pigeonhole or restrict CHWs/Ps to specific titles and positions with limited growth. Instead, we must pivot from viewing CHWs/Ps as entry-level employees or temporary workers to leaders and community experts.

CHWs/Ps can offer the following leadership and expertise in teams and communities:

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Supervision and leadership

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Evaluation and program design

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Design and co-design curriculum

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Training and facilitation

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Peer-to-peer support and mentoring other CHWs/Ps





## CHWS/PS IDENTITY VS TITLES AND FUNCTIONS

There has been confusion around titles such as case managers, navigators, and care coordinators; these titles have been attributed or confused with CHWs/Ps. It is important to clarify that a title/function does not define a CHWs/Ps. On the contrary, CHWs/Ps is an identity, it is who they are intrinsically that makes them CHWs/Ps and titles/functions define what they do. Functions/titles can be performed by CHWs/Ps, but could also be carried out by social workers, nurses and family members.

The CHW/P identity can be defined as the ability to connect deeper with one's own community and the genuine desire to serve from within. By sharing similar backgrounds and lived experiences with those they serve, CHWs/Ps can use shared cultural context as a vehicle to connect with community members. Without human connection, change in the community

is difficult and a title, function, or training can not determine the effectiveness of CHWs/Ps. It is not a title/function that determines who is a CHWs/Ps, instead it is who they are inherently that makes them well-positioned to serve and lead with and for their community.

Who better than a single mother who has overcome domestic violence and has raised children in a disadvantaged community to advise another mother who is suffering from domestic violence and is experiencing challenges in raising her children?

## Is there a difference between someone who is working as a health navigator or case manager and a CHW/P?

The primary difference lies in how community members and their families respond or interact with each of them. Some community members have expressed that they feel disconnected from and distrust traditional providers because these providers do not live in the same community and do not understand the community's challenges and strengths. The community might have felt judged or misunderstood by someone who might hold the title of Community Health Worker, Health Navigator, or Patient Advocate; however, likely, they do not possess the authentic values, shared experience, and identity of a CHW/P.

On the other hand, the social psychology and health disparities literature explain that community members and their families feel more comfortable with a CHW/P who shares their same background, lives in the same community, and speaks their language in a way that is both well understood and culturally appropriate.<sup>[3]</sup> A CHW/P avoids jargon and, most importantly, empowers and encourages all community members on a strength-based approach versus a deficit-based approach.

The CHWs/Ps share similar life experiences and have more often than not been in the community members' shoes, and it is this type of empathy that gives the CHWs/Ps the potential to be a positive force and strong contributor to the care team.



### The identity of the CHW/P includes, but not limited to:

Live, play and work in the same community they are serving

Share the same background (culturally, ethnically, migration, work, etc.)

Speak the same language in a way that the community understands, avoid jargon

Cultural humility

Share similar life experience

Maintain loyalty and have a strong sense of commitment to the community

Build strong relationships with community members

Work with a social and health equity lens

Gain mutual trust, credibility and respect



# ADVANCING WHILE MAINTAINING THE ESSENCE OF THE CHW/P IDENTITY

We believe that a one-size-fits-all training is impractical; as CHW/P's identity is unique, therefore, they should be able to choose career opportunities to grow without losing their identity as community members, agents of change, experts and recognized leaders with strong bonds in the communities they care about deeply.

Our initiative is to encourage CHWs/Ps to advance in their skills, interests, and professional development goals. While they are evolving in their career advancement, they should maintain a social justice and systems change lens, and remain accountable and loyal to the community.

The El Sol CHW/P Training Center provides solutions and facilitates dialogue about how CHWs/Ps can advance in different areas within the CHW/P profession. We can prepare CHWs/Ps and agencies in this career advancement initiative approach.

## Example of Career Advancement Guide

CHW/P Management	
<b>Role</b>	CHW/P Team leader
<b>Job Duties</b>	Provides support to CHWs/Ps peers and is responsible for most community project activities such as scheduling education sessions, outreach activities, attending events, and providing all the campaign materials to the CHWs/Ps. Each team leader will oversee a county region with 3-6 CHWs/Ps and report to the CHW/P Program Supervisor.
<b>Requirements</b>	Knowledge about teamwork, leadership, basic program planning and evaluation, team supervision, cultural humility, popular education
<b>Core Competences Skills</b>	Communication Skills, Interpersonal and Relationship-Building Skills, Capacity Building Skills, Professional Skills and Conduct
<b>Experience Required</b>	Community Health Worker/Promotor for at least 2 years
<b>Average Salary</b>	\$47,000* <i>Average Salary based in California</i>
<b>Training Recommendation</b>	100 hours combined: Training in CHW/P health education and facilitation, training in team management and supervision



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#### References:

- <sup>[1]</sup> El Sol NEC, CHW/P Career Pathway Initiative, 2022, P 4
- <sup>[2]</sup> A-Framing-Paper-The-Promotor-Model.pdf, Building Healthy Communities (2011), P 6
- <sup>[3]</sup> A-Framing-Paper-The-Promotor-Model.pdf, Building Healthy Communities (2011), P 11  
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