

## Connecting Genetic Counselors and Community Health Workers

### Why this Document Exists

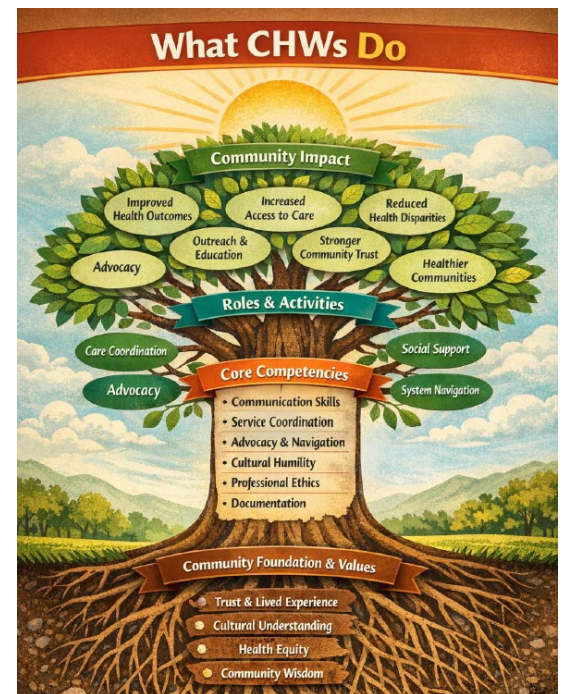
This document provides a shared foundation for collaboration between **Genetic Counselors (GCs)** and **Community Health Workers (CHWs)**. As genomics becomes increasingly relevant in primary care and public health, coordinated partnerships between these professions help ensure that patients, especially those from historically underserved communities, receive equitable, culturally responsive, and understandable genomic information and services.

### About CHWs for Genetic Counselors

Community Health Workers are trusted public health professionals who come from, live in, or deeply understand the communities they serve. They focus on relationship-building, education, health system navigation, and advocacy.

#### What GCs should know about CHWs:

- **Trust & Cultural Insight:** CHWs often have longstanding, community-embedded trust that allows them to reach individuals who may be hesitant to engage with the healthcare system or with genetics specifically.
- **Health Literacy Expertise:** CHWs specialize in explaining health concepts in accessible, community-centered language, helping bridge the gap between complex genetic information and patient understanding.
- **Navigation & Support:** They help patients complete referrals, prepare for genetic appointments, collect samples, return forms, and follow through on next steps.
- **Barrier Identification:** CHWs surface social, logistical, and emotional barriers to genetic services and collaborate with GCs to address them.
- **Complementary Role:** CHWs do not replace GCs; rather, they extend reach, improve engagement, and add cultural and contextual insight that enhances genetic counseling.



## About Genetic Counselors for CHWs

**Genetic Counselors (GCs)** are healthcare professionals trained in both medical genetics and counseling. Their role blends technical expertise with psychosocial support to help people understand and make informed decisions about genetic information.



### What CHWs should know about GCs:

- **Genetics and Genomics Expertise:** GCs apply an advanced knowledge of genetics and genomics to interpret family history, genetic risk, and genetic test results. They help determine which tests are appropriate and explain the benefits, limitations, and implications of each.
- **Patient-Centered Counseling:** GCs guide individuals and families as they process complex genetic information, consider decisions about testing and health implications, and make informed decisions aligned with their values and goals. GCs also provide emotional support and help patients navigate uncertainty, adjustment to genetic risk or diagnosis, and more.
- **Risk Assessment:** GCs assess personal and family medical histories to determine the probability of inherited conditions. They provide individualized risk assessments and recommend screening and/or prevention strategies.
- **Communication and Education:** GCs translate complex genetics and genomics concepts into digestible information tailored to the patient's specific needs. They promote shared decision-making by helping patients understand their options as well as the potential risks and benefits of genetic testing.
- **Collaboration with CHWs:** GCs rely on CHWs to enhance communication, reinforce education, ensure follow-through with referrals and appointments, and relay community needs, barriers, or concerns.
- **Scope and Boundaries:** While CHWs help educate and prepare patients, only GCs (or other licensed genetics professionals) perform risk assessments, genetic test selection, and result interpretation.

## Partnering for Collaboration

Community health workers (CHWs) and genetic counselors are uniquely positioned to form strong, sustainable partnerships because their core competencies are highly complementary and often overlap. Both professions prioritize patient-centered communication, cultural humility, education, and trust-building skills that are crucial for translating complex health information into meaningful, actionable guidance. CHWs bring deep community insight, lived experience, and expertise in outreach and engagement, while genetic counselors contribute specialized knowledge in genomics, risk assessment, and clinical interpretation. Together, this alignment allows for more effective bidirectional communication, where CHWs can facilitate culturally responsive education and navigation, and genetic counselors can ensure accuracy and depth of genetic information. By leveraging these shared competencies, partnerships can strengthen care coordination, improve access to genetic services, and foster trust within communities. This collaborative foundation not only enhances immediate service delivery but also supports the long-term sustainability of integrated, equity-centered models of care.

### Additional Resources:

- [National Association of Community Health Workers](#)
- [CDC Resources for Community Health Workers](#)
- [Rural Health Information Hub](#)
- [National Society of Genetic Counselors](#)
- [Find a Genetic Counselor \(NSGC Directory\)](#)
- [Genetic Counseling | Genomics and Your Health | CDC](#)

