

Study Examines Community Health Advisors' Role in Healthy Eating and Physical Activity Intervention

Researchers from the [Prevention Research Center](#) at the University of South Carolina's [Arnold School of Public Health](#) have completed an evaluation of the effectiveness and satisfaction of community health advisors (CHAs) in a church-based health eating and physical activity intervention. The study was led by research professor and co-investigator [Patricia Sharpe](#) and published in the [Journal of Community Health](#).

"Community health advisors contribute to health promotion program effectiveness, but their role in faith-based programs is understudied, and little is known about their role performance or satisfaction," says Dr. Sharpe.

As part of a dissemination and implementation study, the researchers trained 19 CHAs to provide healthy eating and physical activity program training to church committees. Seventeen CHAs trained 345 attendees from 115 churches with 13 of the CHAs providing telephone-based technical assistance for a 12-month period.

At baseline and the one-year mark, the CHAs completed a questionnaire to evaluate their experiences and satisfaction. Staff observers and church committee members also evaluated the CHAs' effectiveness as trainers.

While there were no significant differences in health indicators (e.g., BMI, fruit/vegetable intake, self-rated health) among the CHAs, they did report significant increases in their perceived knowledge of healthy eating and physical activity. They reported high agreement regarding the quality of their training, moderate volunteer satisfaction, and felt that the time required of them was somewhat more than expected.

Church committee members perceived CHAs to be effective trainers and helpful in their technical assistance roles while staff observers rated CHAs as having covered the vast majority of the training content and agree they were effective trainers. Based on these findings, the authors note that assessing CHAs' availability, clear communication about time requirements, and over-recruitment to offset attrition and decrease workload may be needed to improve retention and support satisfaction.