

The National Network of Promotoras and Community Health Workers

Organization Background

Established in California in 2000, Visión y Compromiso (VyC) is dedicated to reducing disparities and improving the health and well-being of underrepresented communities. VyC provides comprehensive and ongoing leadership development, capacity building, advocacy training and support to promotoras/es and community health workers (CHWs). Characterized by *servicio de corazón* (service from the heart), promotores are natural leaders and the “go to” people in their neighborhoods. They share the ethnicity, language, cultural traditions, practices, socioeconomic status and life experiences of the communities they serve (The California Endowment, 2011) and “constitute powerful tools to provide the community with much needed health education and services” (Balcazar, 2007). Promotores share information and resources with family, friends, neighbors, co-workers and other community residents. They are highly trained community experts and trusted members of their communities who educate, empower and advocate for community change in linguistically and culturally responsive ways and share a desire to improve their communities so that all families have improved health and quality of life. They may or may not be affiliated with community-based organizations, clinics, hospitals and health departments and work under diverse job titles (e.g. promotoras de salud, peer educators, advocates, outreach workers, community educators, patient navigators). They are collectively referred to in this document as “promotores.”

The Promotor Model

The Promotor Model is a social change model that can be implemented with any issue (i.e. diabetes, neighborhood safety, breast cancer) because it is the quality of the relationships, not a particular issue area, which has the potential to create community change. Building community trust requires promotores to participate in community activities, visit people in their homes and spend time sitting with people, listening to their experiences and sharing information. Over time, both promotores and the people they meet deepen their commitment to each other but they also change their own behaviors and create change in their families too. The work of a promotor is the work of building mutually beneficial relationships with other community members based on empathy, love and compassion. This love for the community is unique to promotores and is what motivates them to listen, empathize and do what they can to help others. Empathy and love arise naturally and without pity enabling promotores to empower community residents to take steps to create change in their lives.¹

This long-term process is the foundation of the Promotor Model and is what holds the potential for individual and community transformation. The egalitarian nature of this relationship is in contrast to the relationship of a health worker and a patient. Although a health worker may be from the community, speak the patient’s language and take their medical history with understanding and compassion, the health worker and the patient do not participate in a mutual process of relationship building.

¹ During 2011, VyC, Latino Health Access, and Esperanza Community Housing engaged 125 promotores in facilitated conversations in Spanish about the promotor model. Published by The California Endowment, *The Promotor Model: A Model for Building Healthy Communities*, highlights the role of promotores in communities and agencies and the capacity of the Promotor Model to transform communities. This framing paper provides the context for this discussion and can be found at http://www.visionycompromiso.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/TCE_Promotores-Framing-Paper.pdf

The Network of Promotoras and Community Health Workers (CHWs)

The Network of Promotoras and CHWs (Network) was founded in California in 2001 in response to promotores who articulated their need for a network to represent their interests and provide a forum for sharing resources and disseminating best practices. Through a unique partnership with the promotor/a and CHW workforce, VyC has a keen understanding of community issues and is well positioned to address the social determinants that have such as strong impact on health and well being. The Network brings together promotores and the organizations they represent united as one voice behind a vision of healthy and dignified living for all. Currently active in 14 urban and rural regions of California and representing over 4,000 promotores, CHWs and other community workers who use the community-based promotor model, the Network was a direct response to promotores who identified four key priorities:

- Survival, not health, is the most important priority for many families;
- Promotores need improved compensation and benefits and greater respect for their work;
- More resources are needed for promotores and CHW programs; and
- Promotores desire an organization to represent their interests.

VyC addresses these priorities through the Network's five key strategies:

- 1. Advocacy** The Network educates decision makers about the Promotor Model and promotes policies and systems change to reduce disparities and improve well being.
- 2. Capacity Building** VyC created the Promotores Institute to provide culturally and linguistically relevant training and curricula for promotores delivered by expert trainers.
- 3. Collaboration** The Network builds strong relationships among promotores, agencies, institutions, and leaders with the potential to transform communities.
- 4. Communication** The Network increases access to and utilization of published research, best practices and local community based resources.
- 5. Validation of the Promotor Model** The Network advocates for diverse integration of the Promotor

Model in a dignified manner that respects promotores' contributions to the civic, health, education and social services systems in our communities.

The Network accomplishes its work by bringing together promotores, allied agencies and local leaders, who are integrating the Promotor Model to better serve their communities, region by region. In each Network region, leadership committees represent the region and they meet monthly to identify local needs of residents and promotores. These Regional Networks (or Regional Comités) develop, implement, and evaluate an annual work plan to support their work. A VyC staff member joins the coalition to provide training and technical assistance. These Regional Comités drive the development of the Network in each region which, in turn, guides the agenda of the statewide Network and ensures that the organization reflects the collective voice of promotores and CHWs and maintains its focus on reducing health disparities and improving "dignified living and health for all."

National Network

In 2014, The National Network of Promotoras and Community Health Workers (National Network) was formed to respond to calls from promotores and their allies in other states calling for technical assistance and training to integrate promotores and promotores programs in a manner consistent with the values and scope of practice of the community based Promotor Model. The National Network is a vehicle for delivering training and disseminating best practices to support promotores and CHWs and provide technical assistance to improve understanding of the Promotor Model among the organizations, institutions and potential employers that work with the promotores workforce and the communities they represent every day. Today, VyC is developing a systematic process for expanding the Network that incorporates tools for organizing the Network, culturally and linguistically specific training that responds to the core competencies associated with doing the work of the community-based Promotor Model, mentorship, advocacy, and research and evaluation. The National Network is currently active in California, Arizona, Nevada, Washington, Colorado and is expanding to include Oregon, Hawaii, Arkansas, and Washington DC. The National Network convenes twice yearly: once in June and once in December in Los Angeles at VyC's annual Promotoras and Community Health Workers conference *Hacia Una Vida Digna y Sana*.