

Visión y Compromiso™



BEST PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNED

Promotoras Support Communities Disproportionately Impacted by COVID-19

Nearly two years into a global pandemic, Latino, Black and Native American communities continue to experience increased risk of infection, serious illness and death due to COVID-19. Affected very differently than their white neighbors due to longstanding systemic racism, health and social inequities, and community conditions, these communities also experience disparities in underlying health conditions that contribute to community wellness (poverty, population density, residential segregation, unequal access to care, crowded working conditions, differential access to workplace protections, distrust of government institutions). Many Latino and African American workers who perform “essential work” as medical workers, caregivers, restaurant workers, grocery store clerks, warehouse workers, and agricultural workers have few employment protections (paid sick leave, unemployment benefits, employer-sponsored health coverage), are over-represented in high-risk and low-wage work, and still dying at among the highest rates in the country.

Promotores and other grassroots community leaders are invested in helping their community. Known by diverse titles (peer educators, community health workers, system navigators, health advocates), their most powerful credentials are their personal experiences and unique ability to forge trusting relationships. Using culturally and linguistically relevant language, they share information and resources with families, friends and neighbors providing support and referrals to those in need. Promotores are invested in positive outcomes for all families and bring compassion, a personal approach and accessibility into their community work. They work in health and other workforce sectors and are an invaluable resource for connecting residents to health and social services.

The community wants to be connected and as promotores, we are genuinely interested in the community—it's a reciprocal relationship. Promotores generate trust, empathy, confidentiality and belonging. The community opens up to us and shares personal stories they won't even tell a doctor.

Since the pandemic began, Visión y Compromiso's teams of promotores have been on the frontlines in immigrant and undocumented communities throughout California helping reduce the physical, emotional, social and economic consequences of the pandemic providing in-person and virtual outreach and education, coordinating testing and vaccination events, facilitating peer support groups, engaging small businesses, distributing emergency relief funds, and more. Our workforce of promotores has doubled to over 100 promotores helping Visión y Compromiso to:

- ✓ Facilitate a weekly webinar series for promotores about the health and socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19.
- ✓ Distribute over \$3 million in economic relief to immigrant workers, farmworkers, promotores, and their families.
- ✓ In 2020, share information in Spanish with nearly 400,000 residents, provide more in-depth education to 88,162 people, and make testing and vaccine appointments and referrals for nearly 50,000 people.
- ✓ Train 30 promotores as peer crisis counselors to staff the CalHOPE warmline in Spanish.
- ✓ Develop and provide Cultural Humility training (English/Spanish) to 10,000 contact tracers.



Visión y Compromiso's lessons learned from supporting promotores during the pandemic include:

1. Our Comprehensive Training Programs Ensure Promotores' Effectiveness and Success

The communities where we work have been heavily impacted by high rates of COVID-19. This requires that our teams of promotores in both urban and rural areas be well prepared, our safety protocols solid, our coordination and messaging accurate and consistent, and our training effective. Visión y Compromiso's trainings integrate *educación popular* (Paolo Freire), a methodology "that draws out and validates what participants already know and do and connects their personal experience to larger social realities."¹

In early March 2020, Visión y Compromiso's Training and Education Department responded immediately to the pandemic creating an ongoing webinar series in Spanish to provide promotores and other frontline workers with accurate information about COVID-19. In a world dominated by social media and a variety of news outlets, promotores need a consistent and reliable source of information to quickly and accurately counter myths and misinformation. Visión y Compromiso's webinars acknowledged promotores' strengths as trusted community leaders, helped build the skills they needed to work in a pandemic, and gave promotores space to ask questions, share experiences and get support.

With the right training, there is nothing a promotora cannot do: she works with medical teams, contact tracers, and community organizations. She administers self-tests, facilitates vaccine distribution, helps residents navigate systems, eliminates barriers, visits people in their homes, and so much more.

2. Our Leadership Model Leads to Workforce Opportunities for the Promotor Workforce

Regardless of their leadership style, supervisors of promotor programs must understand what it takes to work in the community and how to support promotores in ways that will ensure their success. They set the tone for the team, create an environment of trust and compassion, and address the personal and professional impacts that come with community work. This is particularly important when the work is emotionally challenging.

Visión y Compromiso's leadership and employment model integrates promotores from the community as key employees of the organization. Our supervisory model partners lead promotores with experienced program coordinators to prepare them as highly skilled employees of the community health workforce by building leadership and management skills and elevating promotores into upwardly mobile positions within our own organization.

We don't just give promotores information and send them out there. The process of preparing promotores is very important and one of our biggest successes.

3. Our Jobs for Promotores Provide Equitable Compensation and Sustainable Employment

Founded in 2000 in response to promotoras who articulated the need for an organization to represent their interests, Visión y Compromiso has been an advocate for a community-based workforce that includes both volunteer and paid employees from diverse workforce sectors. Valuable community resources, their community connections are jeopardized if promotores are the first to be let go in a pandemic or other public health emergency. Key priorities for this workforce include equitable compensation (a living wage, benefits), policies and practices that support the model, and long-term sustainable work.

Once a week we meet as a group to discuss social and emotional issues. As supervisors, we must create a safe space for promotores to talk about their feelings and experiences. Only then can we dive into the numbers and develop our action plans for the week.

¹ Wiggins, N. Popular education for health promotion and community empowerment: a review of the literature. Health Promotion International, Vol 27(3), 2011.

About Us

Established in 2000, Visión y Compromiso is dedicated to improving the health and well-being of vulnerable communities by supporting promotoras and other community workers. Our Network of Promotoras represents 4,000 promotores, community health workers and other grassroots community leaders in California and a growing number of states. We are the lead agency in California providing promotores with culturally and linguistically relevant training, leadership and workforce development, peer networking, and support. We manage over 40 community-based programs on topics such as chronic disease prevention, mental health and wellness, caregiver training, and more to reduce risk factors for chronic conditions (decreased blood pressure, cholesterol and A1c blood glucose levels), improve nutrition and physical activity levels, improve mental health and emotional well-being, increase knowledge about health systems, coverage, service utilization, and more.



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