

## Columbia Gorge Community Vision

The Columbia Gorge Community Vision serves to provide a framework for identifying and addressing the behavioral health and wellness service gaps in the community including offering recommendations to key stakeholders to promote meaningful service impacts that increase access to care and promote well-being.

The Community Health Improvement Plan Behavioral Health (CHIP-BH) identified behavioral and mental health services as a priority given the impact to the health and wellness of the community. CHIP behavioral and mental healthcare goals include creating culturally and linguistically appropriate care, providing access to care in the areas where people live, and expanding where behavioral health services are offered within the primary care, behavioral health, and community-based settings. Mental health and well-being are viewed as central to the overall health of the community. Untreated mental illness can worsen general well-being, increase inability to cope with life, increase instances of self-harm, and make recovery more difficult.

### Situation

The Columbia Gorge communities need comprehensive, coordinated mental and behavioral health services to help address the care and access gaps within the community. Fostering strong community partnerships and collaboration across existing resources and services is essential to creating a pathway for people to access behavioral and mental health services. The current demand for behavioral health services in the Columbia Gorge exceeds providers' capacity for care, particularly for Spanish-speaking communities. With the shortage of providers, non-traditional healthcare delivery models should be considered in addition to expanding and integrating Traditional Health Workers.

Community Health Workers support Latinx who face a range of individual and social issues that affect their mental health. They respond to individuals diagnosed with various mental health conditions as well as undiagnosed psychotic symptoms that they feel unprepared to address. Depression, alcoholism, suicidal ideation, interpersonal family violence, and other family conflicts are interwoven into people's lives (Garcia, et al. 2021).

Within CHIP, the community indicated that the lack of insurance, fewer bilingual and bicultural providers, and long wait times to get an appointment as barriers to receiving care. Because of the lack of access to mental health services, there is an increase in the utilization of emergency services.

### Community Vision

To understand the community vision for behavioral health in Hood River and Wasco Counties, we interviewed 32 key community stakeholders. The community members and organizations involved include mental health practitioners, Traditional/Community Health Workers and their liaisons, local government and law enforcement members, insurance companies, regional and national health care

systems, and community-based organizations. Despite the variety of roles and organizations represented in the interviews, clear themes emerged throughout these conversations, including the value of Traditional/Community Health Workers, gaps related to culturally responsive and specific services and the local cross-organizational efforts to address the needs of the community.

## The Four Pillars and Recommendations

Our recommendations fall within the four pillars that provide a structured pathway that builds upon one another and how we envision the Columbia Gorge community vision. Although we cannot employ all aspects of the community's vision, we can offer recommendations to address some of the current needs in Hood River and Wasco Counties. We have proposed recommendations under each pillar from everything we have learned from the community and our research. Some pillars will have more robust plans of action than others. Given that there is already great work being done in some of these areas, we wanted to focus on where we could provide the most assistance and what had the greatest need in the community.

These are the four pillars that guide our recommendations:

- Education and professional development
  - Train the Trainer Model
- Collaboration and coordination
  - Resource platform and guides
- Traditional and Community Health Worker advocacy
  - THW advocacy
- Traditional and Community Health Worker funding
  - Expand Per Member Per Month model to include THWs

## Conclusion

The Columbia River Gorge Community Vision focuses on Traditional Health Worker integration including collaboration, easier access to trainings and professional development, increased funding and resources and stronger advocacy for reducing stigma, ensuring a stronger and more expansive approach to mental health promotion, deepening social cohesion, and creating effective opportunities for peer mental health and wellness support.

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## References

Garcia, M. L., Sprager, L., & Jiménez, E. B. (2022). Latino Community Health Workers: Meeting their Community's Emotional Needs in Intuitively Culturally Appropriate Ways. *Progress in community health partnerships: research, education, and action*, 16(1), 17-25.

Community Gorge Regional Community Health Improvement Plan (2021).  
[CHP+Narrative+FINAL+2021+including+appendices.pdf](#)