



State of Wisconsin
Department of Health Services

Tony Evers, Governor
Kirsten L. Johnson, Secretary

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Contact: Jennifer Miller/Elizabeth Goodsitt
608-266-1683

Local Community Health Worker Helping Community Overcome Trauma Featured in Statewide Campaign

With an uptick in violence in some Madison neighborhoods, Blanca Cruz and her team of community health workers (CHWs) at Allied Wellness Center are developing programs with the goal of connecting youth and families with trauma-informed resources to begin the healing process.

“We want to do more to help people feel safe – physically, emotionally, and psychologically. It’s especially important in our community that has been having so much violence recently,” said Cruz.

Cruz is one of several CHWs across the state to be featured in new videos from the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) who provide education about the various ways CHWs help their clients and the health care system achieve better outcomes. The videos and other media to create awareness about CHWs launch in March and will run through August of 2024.

Throughout Wisconsin, CHWs connect people to health and social services that meet their individual needs. Often, CHWs bring personal experience, alongside expertise and training, to their work by living in the community and/or sharing an ethnicity, language, cultural and life experiences, and/or socio-economic background with those they serve.

CHWs are employed across the state at community-based organizations, local and Tribal health departments, schools, and health clinics. Several Wisconsin health systems and health insurance organizations also work with community partners to support CHW services.

At Allied Wellness Center, Cruz works to connect people to the resources they need to be healthy, such as mental health resources, housing resources, to interpreters. Whatever the need, Cruz says her team is built to be adaptable.

“Recently, we started doing home visits, and it’s really made a difference in how we are delivering help,” said Cruz. “We’re going into their sacred space, their safe space, and that is where they feel most comfortable. They have been sharing stories about their life with us.”

Coming to Wisconsin approximately 35 years ago, she knows firsthand the complex challenges people who speak English as a second language experience when navigating new systems. That’s why she believes it’s important to have community resources and CHWs like her, who represent the people in her community.

Looking ahead, Cruz plans on continuing to expand ways in which CHWs are supporting the Allied community beyond crisis response.

“Our team of community health workers is doing transformational work that will generate resilience,” said Cruz. “But we are also seeking sustainability. We want the transformations and resiliency to be sustainable.”

Organizations interested in building CHW programs can find resources and learn more about CHWs and their role in the community on the DHS website at www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/dph/community-health-workers.htm.