



WHAT KIND OF SUPPORT DO VHAs RECEIVE?

The VHA Program is part of CHA's Department of Community Affairs. A Program Manager and Community Health Worker Coordinators oversee the Program. Each Coordinator supports a group of VHAs, provides ongoing training on health-related topics, and monitors the VHAs' progress. Coordinators also help VHAs plan and conduct outreach activities in their communities. Trainings and ongoing activities for VHAs regularly take place in four languages: English, Portuguese, Haitian Creole, and Spanish.

"I found that many people I work with are reluctant to seek treatment. Some prefer natural, or herbal remedies-others try and treat themselves. Some don't go to the doctor because they don't have health insurance. As doctors, my wife and I are committed to helping people. We did similar volunteer work in Haiti after graduating from school. Today, we talk, help people understand their health needs, and show them how to get health care. People feel comfortable with us, and I think they appreciate our efforts."

Gerald Paul, former VHA

SUCCESS STORIES AND AWARDS

Since its inception, the VHA Program has trained over 500 VHAs who live and work in Cambridge, Somerville, Everett, Malden and surrounding communities. Collectively these VHAs speak 16 different languages. In 2011, Program staff and volunteers organized or participated in 122 events in the community, collaborating with more than 100 community-based organizations and churches and reaching over 5,000 community members.

The VHA Program has received numerous awards, including the prestigious National Association of Public Hospitals' Community and Patient-Service Award in 2004, a 2005 Nova Award, a top honor from the American Public Health Association, and the National Minority Quality Forum's Booker T. Washington Award for Wellness in Minority Health in 2008.



HOW DO I GET MORE INFORMATION OR BECOME A VHA?

- English Speaking VHA Coordinator
617.591.6939
- Spanish Speaking VHA Coordinator
617.591.6820
- Portuguese Speaking VHA Coordinator
617.591.6923
- Haitian Creole Speaking VHA Coordinator
617.591.6810



VOLUNTEER HEALTH ADVISOR PROGRAM



A volunteer driven, multicultural health education and outreach initiative to improve community health status

For more information:

617.591.6939

www.challiance.org/vha



Cambridge Health Alliance
A COMMUNITY OF CARING

VOLUNTEER HEALTH ADVISOR PROGRAM

Cambridge Health Alliance's Volunteer Health Advisor (VHA) Program began in 2001 as a volunteer-driven, multicultural, and multilingual health education and outreach initiative to improve community health status. The Program works with faith and community-based organizations to recruit, train, and support a network of VHAs to outreach to members of CHA communities.



ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF VHAs

The VHA Program acts as a bridge between the community and Cambridge Health Alliance by:

- Providing basic health education in disease prevention and wellness
- Organizing health education forums and screening events
- Running support groups for individuals with chronic diseases
- Raising community awareness about the availability of free and low-cost health care coverage
- Assisting community members in accessing health care



BECOMING A VHA

Anyone who is interested in keeping their community healthy can join the VHA network. Some VHAs join as individuals and others join as a group from a church or community-based program.

Individuals interested in joining the VHA Program should be willing to:

- Become a leader in improving the health of their community
- Develop strong community connections and networking skills
- Organize special presentations, health fairs and other screenings events
- Acquire new health skills and/or share previous health knowledge and skills

"To be a VHA is to make a difference in the lives of the children and adults by giving them education, counseling and medical care. I found that the VHA program gave me an opportunity to work with people from different backgrounds, including the Brazilian community. Through this program, volunteers have the chance to make a personal contribution and connection to people."

Jesse Branth, VHA since 2003

"Being a Volunteer Health Advisor has given me the opportunity to educate myself about eating habits, chronic illness and its prevention. Every time I talk to someone, I put in practice what I have learned. There are members of my family in the Dominican Republic who have diabetes and high blood pressure. I have taught them how to use the glucometer and how to take their blood pressure. As a result, my father is a volunteer there teaching his neighbors how to test themselves and the benefits of knowing how to control their glucose and blood pressure."

Alpha Valerio, VHA since 2003

VHA TRAINING

Potential VHAs must attend a 20 hour health education training, which includes topics such as:

- Health and disease prevention
- Health access and outreach
- Empowerment and communication skills
- Public health
- Access to primary care and health insurance
- Performing health screenings (such as glucose, cholesterol and blood pressure)

VHAs can further their training and skills by becoming specialists in areas such as:

- Nutrition
- Breast Health
- Research
- Diabetes

