

Community Health Workers

Foster Accessibility



Angie Cho is an undergraduate student at McGill University majoring in physiology, with an interest in clinical research. Committed to accessibility and inclusion, Angie is a volunteer at Hear Quebec, primarily assisting with research towards the Include-**ME** project. She hopes to learn more about hearing health.

Currently, with such a vast healthcare system, a growing number of patients are not receiving the personalized support they require. One of the solutions to this growing issue is the implementation of Community Health Workers (CHWs). CHW is a broad term which describes a person who shares similar traits and/or lived experiences with patients accessing care in their community. These similarities allow CHWs to connect with patients on a personal level, allowing them to address health concerns which otherwise may be overlooked. CHWs act as liaisons between marginalized populations and healthcare professionals. One prime example involves Indigenous CHWs in Ecuador, who became known for their primary care delivery and educational support during the COVID-19 pandemic (Fiallos et al., 2020). CHWs are crucial frontline health workers responsible for reducing the healthcare access gap for marginalized groups, addressing the needs of specific communities.

CHWs can be of great help in the context of hearing health. Recently, Johns Hopkins University launched the Hearing Health Equity through Accessible

Research and Solutions (HEARS) program. This program enlisted CHWs in providing low-cost amplification devices and over-the-counter hearing aids. This initiative allows CHWs - individuals who share the lived experience with hearing loss - to educate users on the devices and troubleshoot issues they may be experiencing. HEARS is considered to be a pilot clinical trial in assessing the impact of CHWs on hearing care.

As part of their results, this study concludes that “CHW-delivered hearing care intervention significantly improved physical health-related quality of life” (Nieman et al., 2022). This research is crucial considering that there is such limited insight on the work being done by CHWs in North America. The HEARS program exemplifies how barriers can be broken down in patient communication, which is crucial to the hearing loss community.

Here at Hear Quebec, we have noticed that while hearing devices and other assistive listening devices (ALDs) are constantly being updated. People with hearing loss are having trouble keeping up with these new technologies. For these

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reasons, Hear Quebec is launching a new initiative, the **Include-ME** program. With this service we will train Accessibility Ambassadors (AAs), all of whom will be individuals with lived experience of hearing loss and using ALDs themselves. The AAs will help people with hearing loss understand more about their ALDs and address any issues they have with incorporating these devices into their lives. An example of these services would be linking their devices to TVs and sound systems, so they can better access media. With our AAs, there will be personalized support for individuals to help them get adjusted to their devices and use them to their full potential. They will also perform follow-ups to check in with every individual on the use of their device(s), and possibly address any further concerns. This checkup is vital, as it serves to assess whether people are adapting to their device and address any stigma the individual feels as they go through this process. One of the major, yet unspoken, barriers revolving around hearing devices is the acceptance of the device itself and being comfortable in using it. AAs will be uniquely well suited to address these issues, as they would have often experienced this stigma themselves. With this in mind, this program will allow us to offer assistance to those struggling with their hearing devices.

In summary with this service, we hope to alleviate some of the problems that complicate the lives of those with hearing loss through a personalized and compassionate approach.

CALL TO ACTION

Do you appreciate and understand how technology such as assistive listening devices can help a person with hearing loss communicate and cope better? Do you want to learn more about technology in order to support others? We are currently recruiting Accessibility Ambassadors to begin training this fall for the launch of the **Include-ME** program in October this year. Join us for the **information session** in our **office or online** on **September 21st**, from **2:00 - 3:00 PM** to learn more.

References

Fiallos, K., Morales, J., Cornejo, L. M., Beukeboom, C., & Doucet, A. (2020, November 6). Indigenous Community Health Workers Rise to the COVID-19 Era. *Global Health Programs*. https://www.mcgill.ca/globalhealth/files/globalhealth/katherine_fiallos.pdf

Nieman, C. L., Betz, J., Garcia Morales, E. E., Suen, J. J., Trumbo, J., Marrone, N., Han, H.-R., Szanton, S. L., & Lin, F. R. (2022). Effect of a community health worker-delivered personal sound amplification device on self-perceived communication function in older adults with hearing loss. *JAMA*, 328(23), 2324. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2022.21820>

