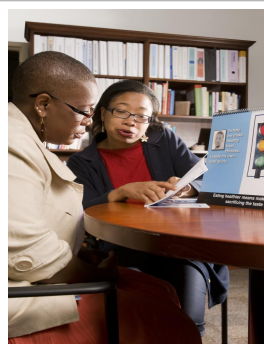


What is a Health Education Specialist?

Promoting the health of individuals, families, and communities: Health Education Specialists

What is a Health Education Specialist?

Health education specialists, also called health educators, teach people about behaviors that promote wellness. They develop and implement strategies to improve the health of individuals and communities. At a minimum, they have a bachelor's degree and many have advanced training or certification.



What do Health Education Specialists Do?

- Assess the needs of people and communities they serve
- Develop programs and events to teach people about health topics or manage their conditions
- Evaluate the effectiveness of programs and educational materials
- Help people find health services or information
- Provide training programs for other health professionals or community health workers
- Supervise staff who implement health education programs
- Collect and analyze data to learn about their audience and improve programs and services
- Advocate for improved health resources and policies that promote health

What is a Certified Health Education Specialist?

The Certified Health Education Specialist (CHES) designation signifies that an individual has met eligibility requirements for and has successfully passed a competency-based examination demonstrating skill and knowledge of the [Seven Areas of Responsibility of Health Education Specialists](#), upon which credential is based. MCHES, the master's level of certification, includes a set of advanced eligibility requirements. Certification is provided by the National Commission for Health Education Credentialing, which requires an ongoing commitment to continuing education.

Where do Health Education Specialists Work?

According to the U.S Department of Labor, there were approximately 58,900 health educators in 2012 in the following workforce settings.

- **Health Care Facilities:** Health educators often work with patients and their families, teaching them about their diagnoses and about necessary treatments and procedures. They direct people to outside resources, such as support groups and home health agencies.
- **Colleges and Schools:** Health educators may plan programs, distribute materials, and also provide student trainings that will allow students to become advocates for health amongst their peers.
- **Public Health Departments:** Health educators plan and implement a variety of programs that cover many prevention, detection, and/or treatment of infectious and chronic diseases. They develop materials to be used by other public health officials. During emergencies, these individuals provide safety information to the public and media. They provide guidance to health-related non-profits to obtain funding and other resources.
- **Nonprofit Organizations:** Health educators create programs and materials about health issues for the community that their organizations serves. Many health educators will become advocates for the audience they are working with.
- **Private Businesses:** Health educators identify common health problems among employees and create incentive programs to encourage employees to adopt health behaviors.



Employment of health education specialists is expected to grow by 19% from 2012-2020. Growth will be driven by efforts to improve health outcomes and to reduce healthcare costs by teaching people about healthy habits and behaviors and utilization of available health care services.¹

How are Health Educators Different from Community Health Workers?



Health educators need a bachelor's degree and many employers require the CHES credential. Requirements for community health workers vary, although they typically have at least a high school diploma and must complete a brief period of on-the-job training. Health educators typically supervise community health workers.

Why is Health Education Important?

Health education improves the health status of individuals, communities, states, and the nation; enhances the quality of life for all people; and reduces costly premature deaths and disability.

- By focusing on prevention, health education reduces the costs (both financial and human) spent on medical treatment. Chronic conditions, such as diabetes, heart disease, and cancer, consume more than 75 percent of the \$2.2 trillion spent on health care in the U.S. each year.² Spending as little as \$10 per person on proven preventative interventions could save the country over \$16 billion in just five years.³
- Health education specialists offer knowledge, skills, and training that complement those health care providers, policy makers, human resource personnel, and many other professionals whose work impacts human health.

1. Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, *Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2014-15 Edition*, Health Educators and Community Health Workers, on the Internet at <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/community-and-social-service/health-educators.htm> (visited February 13, 2014).

2. Partnership to Fight Chronic Disease (2009). January 27, 2009 press release. Access on February 13, 2009 at <http://www.fightchronicdisease.org/media/statements/pfcd/Stimuluspackage.cfm>.

3. Trust for America's Health (2008). Prevention for a Healthier America: Investments in Disease Prevention Yield Significant Savings, Stronger Communities. June, TFAH.