

COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS: Improving Quality of Life in Palliative Care for Underserved Populations



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INTRODUCTION:

This study explores how community health workers (CHWs) improve palliative and hospice care access for marginalized patients. As non-clinical team members, CHWs bridge the gap between patients and providers, address social determinants of health (SDOH), coordinate resources, and educate on palliative and hospice services. Their role helps reduce hospitalizations and enhance quality of life. In this project, CHWs facilitate transitions in care, home services, and end-of-life planning to shift care into the home.

OBJECTIVE:

Observe how CHWs in the home setting improve health outcomes by reducing SDOH and promoting palliation for patients diagnosed with serious illnesses in underserved communities.

METHODS:

Palliative-care-trained CHWs conducted home visits to facilitate patient-family centered conversations. Chart audits were completed on visits from August 2024 to March 2025. Two palliative care nurse practitioners reviewed the notes to assess benefits provided and barriers addressed. The review included two CHWs serving low-income communities in Chicago and one CHW serving vulnerable populations in Philadelphia.

RESULTS:

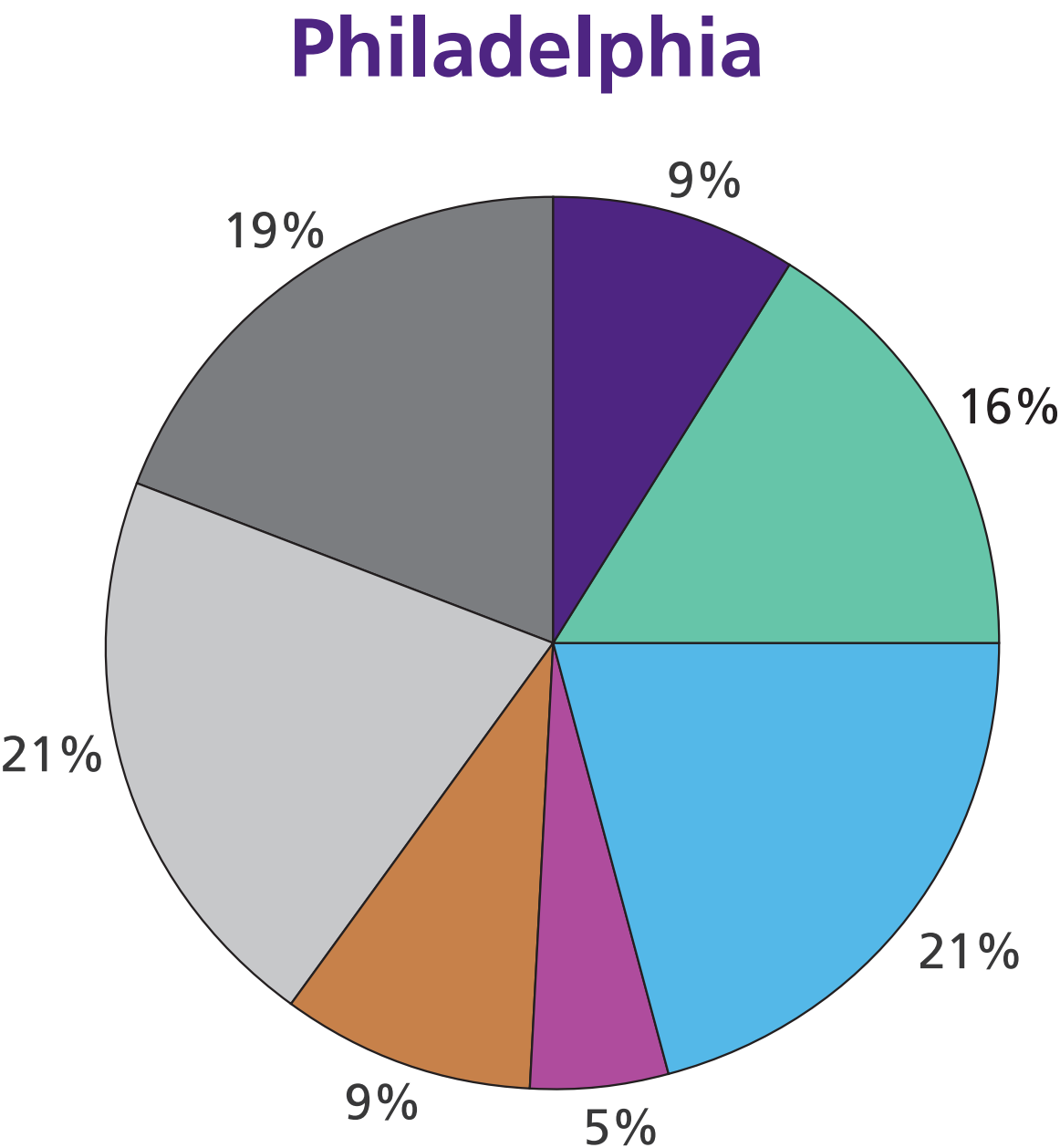
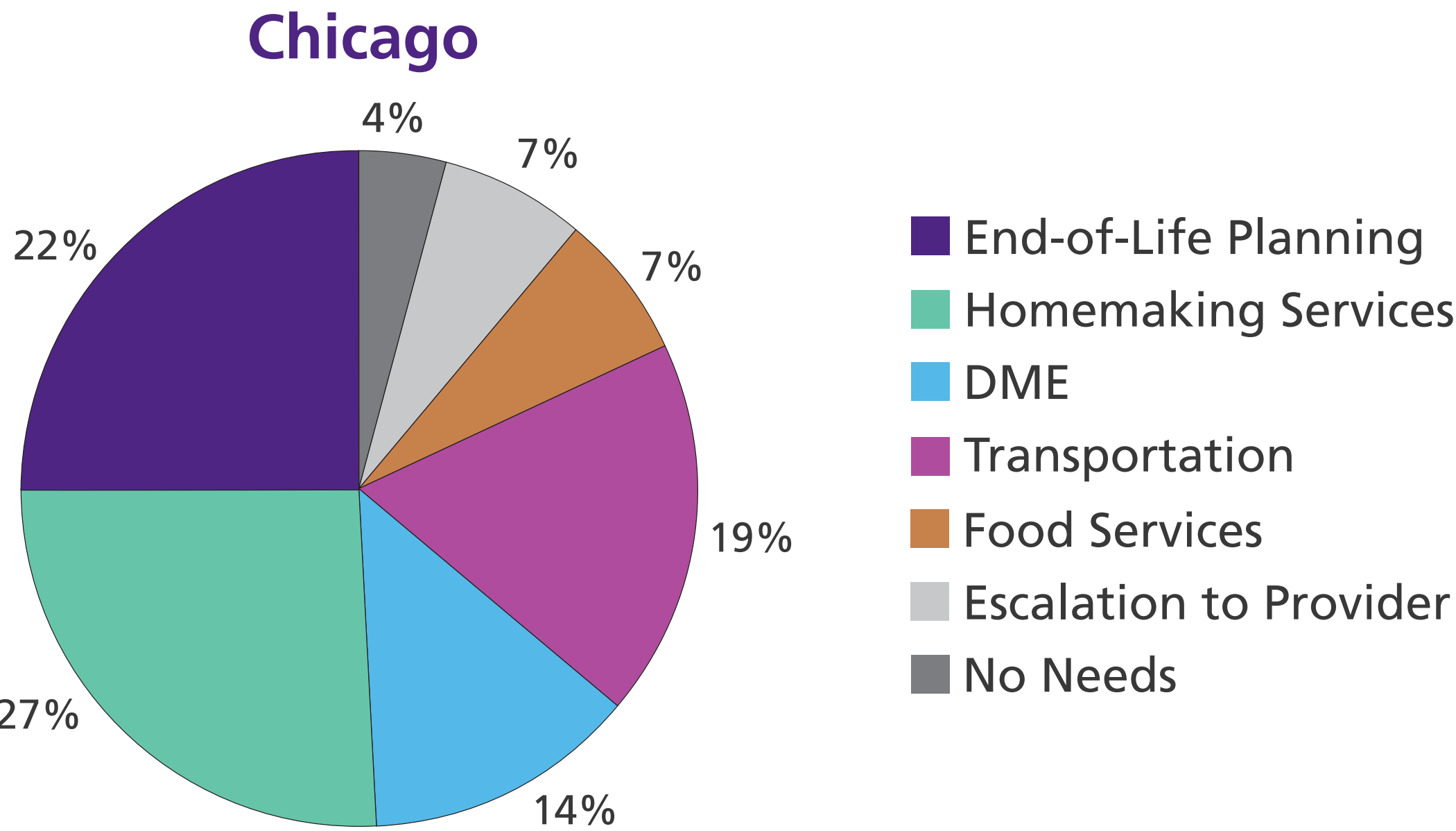
310 total visits for 104 patients.

In Chicago:

- 26 received homemaking services
- 21 received end-of-life planning interventions
- 18 utilized transportation services
- 13 received DME to supplement functional decline
- 7 received food services
- 7 had health changes escalated to a provider
- 4 had no needs

In Philadelphia:

- 9 had chronic conditions escalated to a provider
- 9 received DME to supplement functional decline
- 7 received homemaking services
- 4 received end-of-life planning interventions
- 4 received food services
- 2 utilized transportation services
- 8 had no needs



CONCLUSION:

CHWs serve as societal translators, pinpointing gaps in patients’ understanding, alerting clinicians to initiate the appropriate level of care, and guiding patients through end-of-life planning to honor their wishes. CHWs utilize community resources to improve the quality of life for seriously ill patients with limited resources in underprivileged communities.