Community care is an approach utilized by individuals to support one another and the broader community. Community care has existed in BIPOC and QTBIPOC communities for generations as this approach relies on the collectivistic beliefs of many of these communities, where the well-being of the individual is intrinsically tied to the well-being of others, including the larger community. Community care focuses on the connections, intentional actions, and efforts to mobilize individuals to support one another. Community care includes but is not limited to: mutual aid, healing circles, community healing, doulas, faith practices, community health workers, and peer support.

A foundational aspect of community care is the recognition of inequities that exist for individuals and communities. These inequities are often tied to systemic barriers and structures often referred to as social determinants of health\(^\text{10}\) that directly affect the well-being of individuals, including economic factors, access and quality of education and health care, the physical environment, and other complex community structures. As a result, community care responds to existing inequities and gaps in resources by creating new structures to bridge gaps and to increase access to meaningful resources through mutual support and aid provided by individuals and broader community-focused efforts.

**HOW COMMUNITY CARE IMPACTS MENTAL HEALTH**

In essence, community care pushes individuals to think about their well-being as an extension of the well-being of the community they are a part of and belong to, thus individuals work collectively and in solidarity with one another to identify and respond to needs that impact communities as whole systems.

Community care is also critical to an individual’s mental health as it responds to the isolating factors often experienced by individuals who may feel disconnected to their community due to life circumstances, the impacts of racism, marginalization, violence, trauma, and other societal factors. Community care enables individuals to find belonging, connection, and collective support in a welcoming environment—factors which are tied to improved recovery from mental health conditions and overall well-being.\(^\text{11}\) Additionally, community care allows for individuals to feel valued and taken care of in a mutually respectful manner by members of their community.

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# EXAMPLES OF COMMUNITY CARE

Below are a few examples of community care utilized across various communities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TERM</th>
<th>DEFINITION</th>
<th>BACKGROUND</th>
<th>EXAMPLES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peer Support</td>
<td>In behavioral health, a peer is usually used to refer to someone who shares the experience of living with a mental health condition or substance use disorder.</td>
<td>Peer services are based on the principle that individuals who have shared similar experiences can help themselves and each other. Research shows that peer support in traditional mental health settings improves engagement and well-being and reduces mental health hospitalizations. Many traditional peer support settings do not address aspects of shared identity like race and ethnicity. The increase in affordable online services has encouraged more grassroots peer-run organizations that engage in community-specific groups.</td>
<td>Peers go by many names and can work in many different settings. Some examples of peer support spaces include the Fireweed Collective and Peer Support Space.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Health Workers</td>
<td>A frontline public health worker who is a trusted member of, and/or has a close understanding of, the community served.</td>
<td>Community Health Workers can bridge the gap between vulnerable communities and health care, aiding in creating meaningful connections between the community and formal medically-based systems of treatment and support. These roles were adopted into formal systems through the Bureau of Labor Statistics assigning occupational codes to community health workers in 2010 and recognizing them in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA) and Medicaid reimbursements.</td>
<td>Community health workers may be recognized by various titles, including community health advisor, outreach worker, patient navigator, promotores de salud (health promoters), and are present in different settings, including community-based organizations, health care agencies, faith-based groups, and more. One of the earliest identified “community health worker” programs is known as the “Chinese barefoot doctors,” which refers to individuals who were peers trained to act as primary health care providers in rural Chinese communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutual aid</td>
<td>A voluntary reciprocal exchange of resources and services for mutual benefit.</td>
<td>Mutual aid recognizes that the well-being of BIPOC and QTBIPOC folks are bound in each other. Mutual aid showcases that our survival depends on cooperation, not competition. The COVID-19 pandemic has emphasized this need as research shows an increase in mutual aid groups from just 50 in March 2020 to over 500 in May 2020.</td>
<td>Some early mutual aid groups include the Free African Society, which provided aid to newly freed Black Americans, and the Black Panthers, which provided free breakfast for children. Examples of current mutual aid efforts include the Okra Project, which provides meals and resources to Black trans folks; the Homies Empowerment Freedom Store, which provides free food, home and school supplies, and other resources to the local community, and similar efforts like Freedge, a program aimed to reduce food insecurity and food waste through the power of community.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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13 https://www.apha.org/apha-communities/member-sections/community-health-workers
14 Roles of Community Health Workers - RHIhub Toolkit [Internet]. [cited 2021 May 21]. Available from: https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/toolkits/community-health-workers/1/roles
15 History of Community Health Workers (CHWs) in America | MHP Salud [Internet]. [cited 2021 May 21]. Available from: https://mhpsalud.org/programs/who-are-promotoresas-chws/the-chw-landscape/
17 Credit: Becca Barad Mutual Aid 101 2.
18 Mutual Aid Hub [cited 2021 May 19]. Available from: https://www.mutualaidhub.org/resources
### Healing Circles/Talking Circles/Peacemaking Circles
A practice where individuals come together to provide support and assistance to one another. These practices are rooted in the traditional culture of indigenous people. Healing circles carry a purposeful acknowledgment of systemic racial trauma, stress, anger, pain, frustration, and hurt that diverse groups experience. Healing circles also allow BIPOC and QTBIPOC to recognize how these harmful experiences might affect feelings, thoughts, actions, and interactions. A range of activities can occur within the realm of the circle of which some examples include the sharing of personal experiences, breath work, chanting, and collective prayer.

### Community Healing/Healing Justice
A framework intended to identify and holistically respond to generational trauma and systemic oppression, and build community/survivor-led responses rooted in southern traditions of resiliency to sustain our emotional/physical/spiritual/psychic and environmental well-being. Community healing or healing justice was coined by Cara Page and the Kindred Healing Justice Collective. It is a framework and movement created by queer and trans people of color, Black and brown femmes, and their allies focused on community healing. Several practices are utilized in the healing justice framework such as collective art, rituals, and altar building. Community healing/healing justice practices range for each community the practice is intended to serve, as the framework of healing justice requires a holistic response to the trauma and violence experienced by individuals and communities. Examples of organizations focused on healing justice include BEAM Collective, La Cura podcast, Spirit House, and Project South.

### Doulas/Midwives
A trained professional who provides continuous physical, emotional, and informational support to a mother before, during, and shortly after childbirth to help her achieve the healthiest, most satisfying experience possible. Doulas and midwives are an essential part of community care as these individuals provide critical support to women across BIPOC communities who are at increased risk for poor maternal and infant health outcomes. In fact, researchers have shown that Black and American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) women have higher rates of pregnancy-related death compared to white women. Additional studies show that doulas and midwives improve maternal health evident through reduced rates of C-sections, improved birth weight of the baby, and reduced birthing complications.

There are several organizations dedicated to improving access to doulas and midwives, as well as providing doula and midwife services to local communities. A few examples include Sista Midwife Production, Asian Birth Collective, Center for Indigenous Midwifery, La Luna Doula, National Black Doulas Association, and National Association of Certified Professional Midwives.

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20. [https://www.dona.org/what-is-a-doula/](https://www.dona.org/what-is-a-doula/)