

Community Health Advocates



Women speaking-out for safe,
respectful and appropriate
health care for women!

*The Health Advocate in your community wants to
help you get your health care needs met.*

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Community Health Advocate Project was developed because many women are not getting their health care needs met. There are many barriers women face accessing *safe, respectful* and *appropriate* health care. This project seeks to address these issues by training and supporting advocates who will speak-out for women in their communities. They will *raise awareness* of the needs of the women in their communities, *educate* women on their rights, and help women *develop tools* to access safe health care.

WHO ARE THE ADVOCATES?

Community Health Advocates are volunteers trained and supported by the Vancouver Women's Health Collective, and other community groups. Our goal is to keep training and supporting more advocates to represent a greater number of women. Currently, the following groups of women in Vancouver and/or Richmond have access to a trained volunteer advocate:

African Women
Somali Women
Women with Disabilities
Mental Health Consumers
South Asian Women
Latin American Women
Lesbians and Bisexual Women
UBC Students
Chinese Women
Low-Income Women
Aboriginal Women

WHAT IS ADVOCACY?

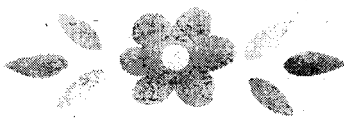
In this project, the advocate may work in a variety of ways, depending on the needs of the community. The advocate may accompany women to their doctor for support and help overcome language barriers. She may be available to listen to women's experiences and help find further resources within the community. She may coordinate workshops for women on health issues. She may raise awareness in the community about what women need from the health care system, and lobby for change.

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO A HEALTH CARE SYSTEM THAT MEETS YOUR NEEDS

- ☞ Have you ever been treated poorly by your health care provider?
- ☞ Have you tried to complain about your treatment and been frustrated?
- ☞ Have you been told that your illness is "all in your head"?
- ☞ Do you feel that you know your body better than anyone else, but no one believes you?
- ☞ Have you been frustrated because you can not find a health care provider who speaks your language?
- ☞ Do you feel like you are not being heard by your health care provider?
- ☞ Do you want to learn more about alternative medicine, but are afraid to talk to your doctor about options?



Your Community Health Advocate will listen to you and offer support and information. She will encourage you to find resources in your community that can help you get the best health care possible.



What are my rights as a woman in the health care system?

- You have the right to be treated with dignity and respect
- You have the right to make decisions about your health care needs
- You have the right to access information in a way that makes sense to you
- You have the right to be heard
- You have the right to choose your own health care provider and to have a second opinion
- You have the right to bring a friend, husband or partner to the doctor for support
- You have the right to access your medical files
- Many more....

How can I make a complaint about my treatment in the health care system?

Some women who want to make formal complaints about their experience with their health care provider do not know where to go. Talk to your Community Health Advocate about ways to tell your story.

How do I find more resources in my community about my health issues?

Your Community Health Advocate will help you find support, information, and resources in your neighbourhood.

I just want to share my experiences with someone who will understand!

Your Community Health Advocate will listen to your story and work to make changes in the health care system to respond to your issues.

Why do women need Community Health Advocates?



Here are some stories from women about their treatment in the health care system.



"I complained about pain during menstruation and was told it was normal. 2 years later, I found out that I had endometriosis."



"My doctor wouldn't treat me for my migraines. He said all I need to do is lose weight."



"Women with disabilities are considered asexual in our society. They do not get the same information about sexuality as able-bodied women."



English was her second language and her practitioner didn't have enough patience to understand her problem. She was treated like a child and left the office with no help.



"When I told my doctor I am a lesbian, she became very uncomfortable. Then she told me I did not need a PAP smear because I am not sexually active [with men]."



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A Project of the
Vancouver Women's Health Collective



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