

# Disability Training for Community Health Assistants in Zambia



<b>Geography and scale:</b>	Zambia, National
<b>Type of Disability</b>	All types

- Involved actors**
- Ministry of Health (MoH)
  - Zambia Institute for Special Education
  - Clinton Health Access Initiative (CHAI)
  - United States Agency for International Development (USAID)



**Best practice description**

In 2019, the Clinton Health Access Initiative (CHAI) worked with the Government of Zambia in facilitating a 5-day training aimed at improving Community Health Assistants' (CHAs) skills and capabilities for inclusive patient focused healthcare to persons with disabilities. The program trained Ministry of Health (MoH) staff, and tutors and clinical instructors at the two main CHA training schools. By focusing on the teachers and liaisons who work daily with CHAs, the objective was to determine together ways to incorporate greater understanding of the health needs of people with disabilities, and the barriers they face when seeking healthcare, into the education and assessment of CHAs going forward. The training focused on:

- 1) The unique health system experience of people with disabilities
- 2) Communication skills (e.g., engagement and communication with children with autism), and introductory sign language
- 3) Teaching skills in orientation and mobility content to students with visual impairment
- 4) Use of assistive devices, and other neurological disorders

**Origin / impetus for best practice**

- In Zambia, CHAs play an important role by filling the gap and increasing access to basic health services for rural communities.
- In 2016, the Zambian MoH conducted a curriculum review of the CHA training program and found that CHAs were not being trained on disability inclusiveness. Questions arose as to whether tutors had the required skills and knowledge to teach students disability inclusiveness.
- CHAI, in partnership with the MoH, and USAID under the Community Health Assistants Support Activity, developed this pilot initiative to improve tutors' understanding and comfort around teaching disability inclusiveness.

**Impact / results of implementing best practice**

- Training of 19 tutors (most were nurses and others were environmental health technologists).
- Trainees acquired skills in Zambian sign language and other modes of communication.
- Disability modules will be developed and included in all CHA training schools.

**Critical success factors for best practice**

- Curriculum review of the CHA training program.
- Early involvement and commitment of the MoH.
- Training conducted by a disability specialist hired by the MoH.
- Sufficient time provided for each trainee to familiarize themselves with the training materials and the inclusion of practical sessions.

**Impact statement**

"I see a great improvement in health services, as most clinics and hospitals have trained health workers in sign language. More awareness and training in disability is needed so that in the next three years disabled people in Zambia are assured of better health"

Mukuma Chiwata, deaf lecturer at the Zambia Institute of Special Education.

**Lessons learned**

- Trainees were more receptive to content on sign language and neurological disorders than deafness or blindness. Therefore, more practical sessions and videos about this topic would be ideal.
- Advanced medical terms in sign language should be taught.
- Certified health training schools need a comprehensive disability inclusion curriculum and the MoH should extend disability training to frontline staff.

<b>Sources</b>	
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<b>Further links &amp; information</b>	<p><a href="#">1 USAID/Zambia Health - Community Health Assistants Support</a></p> <p>About: The Community Health Assistants Support Activity ran from March 2019 to June 2021. The overall purpose of the activity was to improve access to cost effective, quality basic health and nutrition services at community level and in health posts across eight provinces (Central, Copperbelt, Eastern, Luapula, Muchinga, Northern, North-Western, and Western).</p>
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