

Community and Social Services

Health Educators

Health Educators help individuals and communities develop healthy lifestyles and wellness. Much of the focus of health education involves encouraging behaviors that can prevent diseases, injuries, and other health problems. Health educators may be employed by schools, businesses, community health organizations in the non-profit sector, health-care facilities, or by state or federal public health agencies.

Common topics addressed by health educators include healthy nutrition, the importance of exercise, avoidance of sexually transmitted diseases, and illness prevention. Health education is typically tailored to the needs or cultural beliefs of a particular population or audience. For example, programs on self-examination for breast cancer are appropriate for women; classes on the effects of binge drinking may be helpful to college students; and programs targeted at older adults need to be different from those aimed at a college-aged population. Health educators must plan programs that are consistent with the goals and objectives of their employers. For example, many nonprofit organizations educate the public about one disease or health topic such as heart disease or diabetes prevention, and, therefore, limit the programs they provide.

Health educators are often responsible for developing their own educational materials and formats, such as a lecture, class, demonstration or health screening, or a video, pamphlet or brochure. These tasks require working with other people in a team or on a committee. Health educators will then implement their proposed plan. This may involve applying for grants or other funding, locating speakers, or securing a place for an educational event. Finally, health educators assess or evaluate their programming, for instance through surveys.

Although programming is a large part of their job, health educators also serve as a resource on health topics. This can include locating services, reference material and other resources, and referring individuals or groups to organizations or medical professionals. Within medical care facilities, health educators tend to work one-on-one with patients and their families. In this setting, a health educator's goal is to educate individual patients on their diagnosis and how that may change or affect their lifestyle. To this end, they may explain the necessary procedures or surgeries as well as how patients will need to alter their lifestyles or follow treatments to manage their illness and/or return to full health. They may also direct patients to outside resources, such as support groups, home health agencies, or social services. In some cases, health educators train hospital staff on how to better interact with patients. They generally work a standard 40 hour week.

Education/Training

How to Obtain:

A bachelor's degree, generally in health education, through an accredited public or private university is necessary. A master's degree (MA/MS), in health education, may be required for some positions and is usually required for career advancement.

Some health educators opt to obtain a credential as a Certified Health Education Specialist (CHES), by taking an additional examination, after completion of a bachelor's degree. The test is administered by the National Commission of Health Education Credentialing. After receiving their certification, health educators must take 75 hours of continuing education courses over a 5 year period to maintain their certification.

More Information on Certification:

National Commission of Health Education Credentialing, Inc.:

<http://www.nchec.org/>

Average Costs:

Tuition and fees for a master's degree earned at an accredited public university in an area like education, including health education costs an average of \$7,900* per year. Completion time is generally 2 years.

Certified Health Education Specialist (CHES) examination fee: \$240, or \$210 for full-time students (early registration), plus the cost of any exam study aids

Costs of continuing education, certification and recertification vary.

*Note: This figure does not include federal, state, or university financial aid resources such as grants, fellowships, scholarships or work study. It also does not include vocational rehabilitation or other state resources available specifically to people with disabilities. The out-of-pocket expense may be significantly less.