

# **CODE OF ETHICAL CONDUCT (CCHW)**

## **PREAMBLE**

The Rhode Island Certification Board (referred to herein as "the Board" or "RICB") provides voluntary certification for behavioral and community health professionals and doulas as a way of assuring competency of services to clients, to the public, and to employers. RIBC is dedicated to the principle that individuals in the field of behavioral and community health and doulas must be held to the highest standards of ethical practice. The Code of Ethical Conduct exists for the protection of clients. To that end, the RIBC has adopted this Code of Ethical Conduct, to be applied to all certified professionals or applicants seeking certification. Individuals are subject to this Code from the date of application to RIBC by the applicant.

The Code is divided into three sections: (1) a Glossary of key terms used in the Code; (2) the Rules of Conduct, which set forth the standards which professionals are required to observe and discussions of selected standards; (3) the Disciplinary Procedures that will be followed by the Board in investigating alleged violations of the Rules. The Board is committed to investigate and sanction those who breach this Code. Certified professionals are, therefore, encouraged to thoroughly familiarize themselves with the Code and to guide their behavior according to the Rules set forth below and to all state and federal laws and regulations that govern their practice and their employment.

Transparency or being visible about your professional behavior is paramount to maintaining the high standards set by RIBC's code of ethical conduct and is therefore expected of certified professionals. Transparency is not an ethical principle but a pro-ethical condition. Transparency is about information, and it embodies honesty and open communication. You must be willing to share information when it is uncomfortable to do so. Transparency entails being honest with oneself about the actions one is taking. It involves keeping one's actions aboveboard. A commitment to transparency demonstrates to the community, employers, and the client that there is nothing to hide.

All certified professionals will eventually be faced with ethical dilemmas that are difficult to resolve and offer challenges to their professional practice. Ethical resolution is a critical process, and all certified professionals are expected to engage in ethical decision-making that includes the evaluation of context of the situation, meaningful values, the appropriate ethical standards, is consultative in nature and includes a credible model for ethical decision-making. RIBC, through its Ethics Committee, is available and willing to act in a consultative fashion to answer any questions pertaining to ethical conduct or dilemmas faced by certified professionals.

## **PURPOSE OF THIS CODE**

The CHW Code of Ethics is based on and supported by the core values adopted by the American Association of CHWs. The Code of Ethics outlined in this document provides a framework for CHWs, supervisors, and employers of CHWs to discuss ethical issues facing the profession. Employers are encouraged to consider this Code when creating CHW programs. The responsibility of all CHWs is to strive for excellence by providing quality service and the most accurate information available to individuals, families, and communities.

The Code of Ethics is based upon commonly understood principles that apply to all professionals within health and social service fields (e.g., promotion of social justice, positive health, and dignity). The Code, however, does not address all ethical issues facing CHWs and the absence of a rule does not imply that there is no ethical obligation present. As professionals, CHWs are encouraged to reflect on the ethical obligations that they have to the communities that they serve, and to share these reflections with others.

## GLOSSARY

**Appeals Committee:** Three RICB board members appointed to hear an appeal

**Applicant:** A person who has applied for certification but is not yet certified

**Certified Professional:** A person who holds a RICB credential

**Client/Service Recipient:** Any person(s) who, either currently or in the past, has received or is receiving services

**Complainant:** A person(s) who files a formal complaint against a certified professional or applicant for certification or, in appropriate cases, RICB may initiate an ethics inquiry and act as complainant

**Distance Services:** The delivery of community health services through the use of technologies such as telephone-based services, video conferencing, texting, smartphone applications and web-based tools

**Ethics:** A standard of behavior by which certified professionals or applicants must abide

**Ethics Committee:** A RICB standing committee charged with the responsibility to review, investigate, and sanction as determined appropriate those who breach the Code of Ethical Conduct

**Hearing Panel:** A panel comprised of RICB Ethics Committee members participating in an ethics hearing and who make recommendations in accordance with the Code of Ethical Conduct

**Hearing Officer:** The RICB Ethics Committee Chairperson or Co-Chairperson who presides over an ethics hearing

**Community Health Credential:** Certified Community Health Worker

**Plagiarism:** An act of appropriating the language, ideas, or thoughts from another person and representing them as one's own original work

**Public Reprimand:** A sanction that is a formal, written, published reproof, or warning to a Respondent who the Ethics Committee has determined to have breached the Code of Ethical Conduct

**Respondent:** A certified professional or applicant for certification against whom an ethical complaint has been filed

**Revocation:** A sanction resulting in the complete and permanent forfeiture of RICB certification or any future RICB certification

**Suspension:** A sanction resulting in the temporary forfeiture of RICB certification for a time-limited period to be determined by the RICB Ethics Committee

**Written Caution:** The least restrictive disciplinary action that a Respondent may receive due to breaching the Code of Ethical Conduct and is a formal, private, non-published letter of warning to the Respondent that cautions against certain conduct or behavior

## **RULES OF CONDUCT**

The following Rules of Conduct, adopted by the RICB, set forth the minimum standards of conduct which all certified professionals and applicants for certification are expected to honor. Failure to comply with an obligation or prohibition set forth in the rules may result in discipline by the RICB.

### **Article 1: Responsibility in the Delivery of Care**

CHWs build trust and community capacity by improving the health and social welfare of the client they serve. When a conflict arises among individuals, groups, agencies, or institutions, CHWs should consider all issues and give priority to those that promote the wellness and quality of living for the individual/client. The following provisions promote the professional integrity of CHWs.

#### **1.1 Honesty**

CHWs are professionals that strive to ensure the best health outcomes for the communities they serve. They communicate the potential benefit and consequences of available services, including the programs they are employed under.

#### **1.2 Confidentiality**

CHWs respect the confidentiality, privacy, and trust of individuals, families, and communities that they serve. They understand and abide by employer policies, as well as state and federal confidentiality laws that are relevant to their work.

#### **1.3 Scope of Ability and Training**

CHWs are truthful about qualifications, competencies, and limitations on services they may provide, and should not misrepresent qualifications or competencies to individuals, families, communities, or employers.

#### **1.4 Quality of Care**

CHWs strive to provide high quality services to individuals, families, and communities. They do this through continued education, trainings, and an obligation to ensure the information they provide is up-to-date and accurate.

#### **1.5 Referral of Appropriate Services**

CHWs acknowledge when client issues are outside of their scope of practice and refer clients to the appropriate health, wellness, or social support services when necessary.

#### **1.6 Legal Obligations**

CHWs have an obligation to report actual or potential harm to individuals within the communities they serve to the appropriate authorities. CHWs have a responsibility to follow requirements set by states,

the federal government, and/or their employing organizations. Responsibility of the larger society or specific legal obligations may supersede the loyalty owed to individual community members.

## **Article 2: Promotion of Equitable Relationships**

CHWs focus their efforts on the well-being of the whole community. They value and respect the expertise and knowledge that each community member possesses. In turn, CHWs strive to create equitable partnerships with communities to address all issues of health and well-being.

### **2.1 Cultural Humility**

CHWs possess expertise in the communities in which they serve. They maintain a high degree of humility and respect for the cultural diversity within each community. As advocates for their communities, CHWs have an obligation to inform employers and others when policies and procedures will offend or harm communities or are ineffective within the communities where they work.

### **2.2 Maintaining the Trust of the Community**

CHWs are often members of their communities and their effectiveness in providing services is derived from the trust placed in them by member of these communities. CHWs do not act in ways that could jeopardize the trust placed in them by the communities they serve.

### **2.3 Respect for Human Rights**

CHWs maintain professional relationship with clients. They establish, respect, and actively maintain personal boundaries between them and their clients.

### **2.4 Anti-Discrimination**

CHWs do not discriminate against any person or group based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, social status, disability, or immigration status.

### **2.5 Client Relationship**

CHWs maintain professional relationships with clients. They establish, respect, and actively maintain personal boundaries between them and their clients.

## **Article 3: Interactions with Other Service Providers**

### **3.1 Cooperation**

CHWs place the well-being of those they serve above personal disagreements and work cooperatively with any other person or organization dedicated to providing care to those in need.

### **3.2 Conduct**

CHWs promote integrity in the delivery of health and social services. They respect the rights, dignity, and worth of all people and have an ethical obligation to report any inappropriate behavior (e.g., sexual harassment, racial discrimination, etc.) to the proper authority.

### **3.3 Self-Presentation**

CHWs are truthful and forthright in presenting their background and training to other service providers.

## **Article 4: Professional Rights and Responsibilities**

The CHW profession is dedicated to excellence in the practice of promoting well-being in communities. Guided by common values, CHWs have the responsibility to uphold the principles and integrity of the profession as they assist families to make decisions impacting their well-being. CHWs embrace the individual, family, and community strengths and build upon them to increase community capacity.

### **4.1 Continuing Education**

CHWs should remain up to date on any developments that substantially affect their ability to competently render services. CHWs strive to expand their professional knowledge base and competencies through education and participation in professional organizations.

### **4.2 Advocacy for Change in Law and Policy**

CHWs are advocates for change and work on impacting policies that promote social justice and hold systems accountable for being responsive to communities.

### **4.3 Enhancing Community Capacity**

CHWs assist individuals and communities in moving towards self-sufficiency to promote the creation of opportunities and resources that support their autonomy.

### **4.4 Wellness and Safety**

CHWs are sensitive to their own personal well-being (physical, mental, and spiritual health) and strive to maintain a safe environment for themselves and the communities they serve.

### **4.5 Loyalty to the Profession**

CHWs are loyal to the profession and aim to advance the efforts of other CHWs.

### **4.6 Advocacy for the Profession**

CHWs are advocates for the profession. They are members, leaders, and active participants in local, state, and national professional organizations.

### **4.7 Recognition of Others**

CHWs give recognition to others for their professional contributions and achievements.