Public health and health prevention are the cornerstone of healthy communities. Shifting the focus of the health care system from the treatment of disease to health promotion and prevention is the key to good health.

Enhancing outreach efforts such as the use of community health workers or promotores in the border region, as patient navigators who promote optimal patient utilization of health services, can improve access to health care, not only for border communities, but for diverse communities in the United States. The U.S.-México Border Health Commission (BHC) recognizes the use of promotores to stimulate participation in health education, behavioral health education, prevention, and health insurance programs can improve health conditions and thereby elevate the health of the nation.

The BHC has supported promotores activities along the U.S.-México border. In 2003, the BHC conducted the Border Models of Excellence initiative to identify promotor a-based best practices and health programs along the U.S.-México border that have made great strides in improving the health and well-being of communities along either side of the 2000-mile border. As a result, the BHC recognized 16 programs determined to be the most successful and/or promising models of excellence and published these projects in the Border Models of Excellence Compendium (available on the BHC website).

Since the initial launch of the 2003 Border Models of Excellence initiative, the BHC has utilized promotores in various health promotion initiatives, including the BHC's Annual Border Binational Health Week, a week-long celebration that focuses on disease prevention and health promotion, and the annual border region component of the National Infant Immunization Week/Vaccination Week in the Americas which provided health promotion, information, and direct services to over 1.2 million residents in the border region. The BHC also continues to collaborate with agencies to train and educate promotores in the border region on various health issues.

In 2010, the BHC published a white paper, Health Disparities and the U.S.-México Border, as a source for implementing innovative models that bring together multiple levels of government and leaders across geographic and jurisdictional borders by improving access to health care, creating a culture of wellness and prevention, and promoting evidence-based interventions and models of excellence. One of the recommendations identified in the white paper was the use of promotores as a proven successful framework that can be replicated throughout the country as it has in some regions to date.

Currently, the BHC is collaborating with the Office of Minority Health and other U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ (HHS) partners on the National Promotores de Salud Initiative, which promotes utilization of promotores as a means of strengthening outreach and education on the availability of health services and insurance coverage to vulnerable, low income, and underserved members of Hispanic/Latino communities. This HHS initiative aims to develop a national program to formally recognize and institutionalize promotores as an effective workforce in providing health promotion and disease prevention outreach services to underserved communities.

The BHC will continue to support the efforts of promotores and seek other collaborative opportunities with border partners that can expand their work.