



## **National Society of Health Coaches**

### **Position Statement**

#### **Health Coaches & Health Coaching: Definition, Qualifications, Risk and Responsibility, and Differentiation from Wellness Coaching**

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There is a plethora of health coach certifications offered today by different types of organizations without a recognized universal definition of health coaching or who is qualified to provide health coaching services. Due to the explosive growth of health coaching and in the interest of public safety, consumer protection, and clarification, the Society states its definition, delineates safe practice, and states the minimum qualifications necessary to be a *health coach* and differentiates it from a *wellness coach*.

#### **Definition**

Health Coaching is the use of evidence-based skillful conversation, clinical strategies and interventions to actively and safely engage clients in health behavior change to better self-manage their health, health risk, and acute or chronic health conditions resulting in optimal wellness, improved health outcomes, lowered health risk and decreased healthcare costs.

#### **Qualifications, Risk and Responsibility**

Health coaching should be conducted by licensed/credentialed healthcare professionals who have the clinical education and training to safely guide clients with acute or chronic conditions or moderate to high health risk. By virtue of the healthcare professional's active, unencumbered license/credential to provide health management interventions within their professional scope of practice, they have personal accountability and liability for their professional actions.

Education and core competencies (with outcomes validated in the literature) for *health coaches* beyond their academic clinical training, degree and credential should include specialized evidence-based health coaching skills of active listening, facilitating behavior change, behavioral science of motivational interviewing, wellness and prevention, client engagement versus a traditional client approach, and the use of evidence-based practice clinical interventions to guide those with acute or chronic conditions and/or moderate to high health risk.

#### **Differentiation from Wellness Coaching**

*Wellness* as defined by Merriam-Webster is the *quality or state of being healthy; or in good health, especially as an actively sought goal*. The Centers for Disease Control define wellness as *the degree to which one feels positive and enthusiastic about life*. It can therefore be reasoned that *wellness* coaching is guidance and inspiration provided to otherwise "healthy" individuals who desire to maintain or improve their overall general health status, which often includes smoking cessation, physical activity, eating well, and general weight management.

*Wellness coaches* play an important role in disease and injury prevention as part of a healthcare team. However, clients with acute or chronic conditions, co-morbidities, or moderate to high health risk should be guided by a *health coach*, who has the professional credentials, legal authority, and specialized skills training given in this Statement to safely guide an individual of this type.