COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS 101
Understanding the CHW

What is a community health worker?

A Community Health Worker (CHW) is a frontline public health worker who is a trusted member of and/or has an unusually close understanding of the community served. This trusting relationship enables the CHW to serve as a liaison/link/intermediary between health/social services and the community to facilitate access to services and improve the quality and cultural competence of service delivery.

A CHW also builds individual and community capacity by increasing health knowledge and self-sufficiency through a range of activities such as outreach, community education, informal counseling, social support and advocacy. (American Public Health Association CHW Section, 2009)

Michigan is reported to have 2,724 CHWs¹ and Michigan employers reported 655 current CHW employees in 2012.²

What do CHWs do?³

- Outreach and community mobilization
- Community/cultural liaison
- Case management and care coordination
- Home-based support
- Health promotion and health coaching
- System navigation
- Participatory research

National support and movement towards CHW recognition

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010 (PPACA) cites CHWs in three sections — §5101, §5313, and §5403 — and identifies them as an important part of the health care workforce. Several organizations have recognized CHW as health professionals and provided support for their increased use:

- Association of State and Territorial Health Officials 2012
- CDC Division for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention 2011
- National Prevention Council 2011
- American Association of Diabetes Educators 2010
- Bureau of Labor Statistics 2010
- HHS National Health Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy 2010
- Agency for Healthcare Research & Quality 2009
- American Public Health Association 2009, 2001
- National Conference of State Legislatures 2008
- American Conference of State Legislatures 2008
- National Fund for Medical Education 2006
- Institute of Medicine 2003
- American Medical Association 2002

Other names for CHWs¹²

- Patient health navigator
- Patient educator
- Maternal child health worker
- Family health advocate
- Peer support specialist
- Community outreach worker
- Promotore(a)
- Community health advocate
- Lay health advisor
- Patient advocate
- Community-based doula
- Recovery coach
- Parent support partner
- Peer educator
- Community care coordinator
- HIV peer counselor
**CHW Legislation in Other States**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Legislation</th>
<th>Number of States</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Addressing CHW infrastructure, professional identity, workforce development, or financing</td>
<td>16 including the District of Columbia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Establish CHW scope of practice</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Authorize Medicaid reimbursement for some CHW services</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Encourage or require integration of CHWs into team-based care models</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Establish CHW advisory board</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Authorize creation of standardized curricula</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Workforce development laws for creating a certification process or require CHWs to be certified</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Authorize certification board for setting education requirements and governance for certification process</td>
<td>4</td>
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**Return on Investment**

**Spectrum Health, Grand Rapids, MI**
- More than 50 CHWs work with maternal child health, hypertension, diabetes, nutrition, healthy lifestyles; work in schools, hospital, community through Health Communities Department
- Core Health ROI over 3 years: “$2.53 in savings for every $1.00 of cost”

**Muskegon Community Health Project/Mercy Health Community Benefit Program, Muskegon, MI**
- Enrollment and program and home visits both positively impacted health outcomes for individuals with diabetes
- CHWs collaborated with financial counselors to increase enrollment in financial assistance plans by 270%; CHWs recovered $350,000 in 2009 by enrolling patients in Medicaid

**Molina Healthcare of New Mexico, 2012**
- Medicaid managed care uses CHWs to intervene with the plan’s highest resource-consuming patients, including those with high ED usage and low treatment adherence
- ROI: Approximately $4.00 savings for every $1.00 of cost

**Denver Health, 2006**
- Community Voices outreach program works with underserved populations on issues including appropriate outpatient service utilization
- ROI: $2.28 saving for every $1.00 invested in the program

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5. Inman E. Optimizing your investment in community health. Presented at: Michigan Community Health Worker Alliance Annual Meeting, Innovation in Action: Community Health Workers are part of Michigan’s Health Future; October 11, 2012; Lansing, MI.
6. Analysis of “Call to Care” in Muskegon: Community Health Worker Outreach and Education to At-Risk Diabetics in Muskegon 2007 through 2009.