



# CHW IMPACT: HYPERTENSION

## THE PROBLEM

Approximately 78 million people in the United States have hypertension.<sup>1</sup> Hypertension is the leading cause of cardiovascular disease, which accounts for the majority of deaths nationwide.<sup>1</sup> Due to the challenges associated with disease management, only 52.5% of hypertension cases are controlled.<sup>1</sup> Individuals with hypertension must coordinate with a variety of providers and adhere to multiple medications and lifestyle changes to control the disease. These challenges are magnified for members of marginalized communities who face additional social, structural, and environmental barriers.

### References

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- <sup>3</sup> Brownstein JN et al. Effectiveness of community health workers in the care of people with hypertension. *Am J Prev Med*. 2007; 32(5): 435-447.
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- <sup>5</sup> Schulz AJ et al. Effectiveness of a walking group intervention to promote physical activity and cardiovascular health in predominantly non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic urban neighborhoods: Findings from the Walk Your Heart to Health Intervention. *Health Educ Behav*. 2015; 42(3): 380-392. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4446166/>
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- <sup>7</sup> The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. U.S. Government Printing Office website. <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-111publ148/html/PLAW-111publ148.htm>. Accessed December 1, 2016.
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## The Role of CHWs in Combating Hypertension

Community Health Workers (CHWs) are public health workers with strong connections to the communities they serve. Their close bonds with community members allow them to serve as liaisons between health/social services and the community, facilitating access to services and improving service delivery to better meet community needs.<sup>2</sup> CHWs help patients navigate the healthcare system, communicate with providers, set goals, and adhere to lifestyle changes through meetings and home visits.<sup>2</sup>

Through healthcare navigation assistance, community education, informal counseling, social support, and advocacy, CHWs help reduce hypertension in the communities that they serve.<sup>3,4</sup> CHWs also help prevent hypertension by promoting healthy lifestyle habits.<sup>3</sup> CHW interventions result in improved behavioral changes, appointment keeping, medication adherence, and healthcare utilization.<sup>3</sup>

Several studies have shown that patients who receive support and health education from CHWs experience significant improvements in blood pressure control<sup>3,4,5</sup> and weight control.<sup>3,5</sup> The positive effect of CHWs on hypertension control has been documented in a variety of contexts, including high-risk Black and Latino communities.<sup>3,4,5</sup>

In its 2011 report, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends expanding CHW workforce, especially to reach racial and ethnic minorities and other underserved populations, to improve health outcomes and reduce healthcare disparities.<sup>6</sup> The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act similarly recognizes CHWs as valuable members of care teams, and allocates funds to support and expand CHW programming.<sup>7</sup>

## CHWs Addressing Hypertension in Michigan

CHW-led hypertension interventions are being developed, implemented, and evaluated in Michigan. CHWs with the Healthy Connections Project in Detroit screened 1,428 women in high-risk communities for type 2 diabetes and hypertension.<sup>8</sup> The Walk Your Heart to Health program established walking groups for Black and Latino residents of Detroit and successfully lowered participants' blood pressure.<sup>5</sup> The Michigan Community Health Worker Alliance (MiCHWA) continues to work with the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services' (MDHHS) Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention Unit to help agencies hire, train, and support CHWs so they can better support individuals and communities with hypertension.

*The Michigan Community Health Worker Alliance (MiCHWA) works to promote and sustain the integration of community health workers (CHWs) into health and human services organizations throughout Michigan through coordinated changes in policy and workforce development. Learn more about MiCHWA at [www.michwa.org](http://www.michwa.org).*