

Michigan Community Health Worker Alliance



MiCHWA CHW Policy Agenda

Background: Lack of the fundamental resources for healthful living, and lack of access to health care and social services and an inefficient and often ineffective care delivery system leads to increased morbidity, mortality and health care costs when individual health conditions such as chronic disease and co-occurring medical and behavioral health conditions are treated without care coordination or consideration of the social determinants of health. Community Health Workers (CHWs) are frontline public health workers whose community membership, life experiences, and understanding of neighborhoods, language and culture, help to build trusting relationships with the people and communities they serve. CHWs provide social support and advocacy that helps overcome barriers to health and wellbeing, bridge communication with health care and social service providers, and link to, and navigate, health and human services systems.

CHWs increasing health knowledge of community members through outreach, education, informal counseling, social support, and advocacy, and improve the quality and cultural competence of care through their services and by increasing the knowledge of other providers about the needs of the people they serve. CHWs address the social determinants of health by considering the needs and strengths of the whole person. CHWs contribute to individual and community empowerment and self-efficacy, improved health outcomes, and decreased costs associated with health promotion, better prevention and management of disease, and improved utilization of care.

CHWs have been working in Michigan communities for over 50 years. They have demonstrated improved health outcomes in maternal and child health, aging, asthma, diabetes, obesity, and depression (EAPC Policy, 2019) . However, most CHW programs still rely heavily on short-term grant and demonstration project funding. When funding ends, so do the successful outcomes for Michigan's residents, and CHWs suffer repeated job turnover or unemployment.

Issue: Lack of payment for CHW services is a major barrier to sustainability.

To elevate and maximize the stability of the CHW workforce in communities, local public health departments, health and social service systems and community-based organizations; to reduce social and health disparities for underserved communities

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and populations and to promote the health of Michigan's people, the MiCHWA CHW policy agenda is comprised of the following recommendations for the state of Michigan to:

- recognize the lived and professional experience of CHWs in addressing the social determinants of health (SDOH) by:
 - including the CHW workforce in any task forces and initiatives related to ensuring health equity and equality.
- expand sustainable financing mechanisms for supporting CHW services
 - All Michigan local and county health departments will employ CHWs.
 - Michigan will specifically create a new Medicaid reimbursement option for CHWs providing support to education and care coordination providers such as community-based organizations, primary care organizations and providers.
 - Michigan will continue to expand contracting by Medicaid Health Plans with community-based organizations for CHW services.
 - Michigan will work with commercial health insurance companies to expand payment options for CHW services
 - MiCHWA will work with national, state, local and community-based partners to support changes in CMS policy to provide Medicare reimbursement for CHW services.
- designate MiCHWA as the body that recommends standards for CHW core competency-based curricula and training programs; reviews and approves training curricula and programs, statewide.
- designate MiCHWA as the organization that registers and recognizes CHWs who have successfully completed core competency-based training.
- provide training for health care providers, payers and social service organizations on potential use of CHWs, how to provide adequate training, and provide continuing education opportunities.

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