

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS

WHAT IS A COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKER?

Patient navigators. Outreach workers. Health coaches. These are a few of the roles filled by community health workers – frontline health workers who can play a critical role in improving health.

Their expertise is in the communities they serve. Most of what affects people's health happens outside the doctor's office, and community health workers are well-positioned to make sure medical care is most effective.

WHAT DO COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS DO?

Community health workers build relationships with patients that allow them to address their needs in a holistic way. For example:

- While a doctor might prescribe an inhaler to a patient with asthma, a community health worker could make sure the patient can afford to fill the prescription and get to the pharmacy during business hours, and examine the patient's home for asthma triggers.
- A clinician might help a patient learn to treat his diabetes, but a community health worker might be the one to learn that the patient is homeless and needs to know how to manage his diabetes without having a place to cook.

WHY DO COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS MATTER?

Research shows community health workers can improve health outcomes and save money for the health care system by ensuring people get the right care. They are especially effective in reaching people who are not well served by the health care system.

WHAT ELSE SHOULD I KNOW?

There are hundreds of community health workers serving people across Connecticut, but most are funded through short-term sources, such as grants, rather than more sustainable funding through the health care system. This means that even effective programs often have to shut down if grant funding goes away.

Nearly ALL states are working to better integrate community health workers into the health care system. More than a dozen states now certify community health workers, which can give the field more recognition and provide assurances for organizations – such as health insurers and health systems – that might pay for their services.

Connecticut does NOT currently certify community health workers, but a state-appointed panel has recommended that the state create a voluntary certification program for community health workers.

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