

VIRGINIA STATE LEGISLATORS: The Case for Investments in Community Health Workers

In 2020, Virginia provided Medicaid and CHIP coverage to approximately 1.5 million residents at the cost of \$13.6 billion. FY2022 costs are estimated at \$18.1 billion. As stewards of the state budget, the Virginia state legislature must ensure that spending is targeted toward the best investments. Community health worker (CHW) programs, which can deliver high-quality care to Virginians at a lower cost to taxpayers, offer an immediate opportunity for funding.

PRIMARY BENEFITS OF CHW PROGRAMS

CHWs can help improve Virginians' health outcomes

CHWs are trustworthy individuals who share life experiences with the people they serve. They work in close partnership with a patient's medical team, helping them see the "whole picture" and address the social factors in a patient's life — such as housing challenges, unemployment, or loneliness — that might be causing poor health.

A large body of evidence shows that CHWs can help to improve the control of hard to manage chronic diseases. They also improve mental health, promote healthy behavior, improve clients' perceived quality of care, and reduce health inequities.

CHWs expand the reach of the clinical workforce, which is constrained by rising wages and supply challenges. They support people in their communities, where social challenges are often experienced.

In Virginia currently, there are approximately 1,500 CHWs providing services to clients. The composition of the CHW workforce reflects the vast diversity of the populations they serve.



Increasing access to CHWs can reduce long-term Medicaid spending

- In a randomized controlled trial, a CHW intervention demonstrated \$2.47 in savings realized within the first fiscal year for every dollar invested in Medicaid services.
- In a meta-analysis of six healthcare innovations funded by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid, only innovations using CHWs were found to lower total costs (by \$138 per patient per quarter).



Investing in CHW programs that adhere to evidence-based standards can offer the state an even stronger return

- Not all CHW programs deliver the same results. Evidence-based CHW programs that include quality guardrails for recruitment and hiring, training, supervision, team integration, and data systems are best positioned to achieve the strongest outcomes.
- CHW productivity is largely determined by the conditions in which they work. Promoting an environment that ensures an appropriate workload, supportive supervision, adequate supplies and equipment, and intentional integration into the community and health system can enable CHWs to be a highly productive workforce.
- The National Committee for Quality Assurance's guidance on critical inputs for CHWs and the Virginia Department of Health's program standards roadmap can guide in identifying effective CHW programs with which to work.
- By investing in employers that implement recommended guidance and standards, legislators can ensure that the CHW workforce is effective and sustainable long-term, which translates into a larger impact on the health and wellbeing of Virginians at lower cost.



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