

VIRGINIA HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS: The Case for Investments in Community Health Workers

In the wake of the pandemic, many Virginia health care providers are struggling with payer-mix changes, clinical workforce shortages, the effects of delayed preventive care, and growing health care disparities. Community health workers (CHWs), who provide tailored social support, advocacy, navigation to the people they serve, are the new American workforce. They are well positioned to address the challenges for which VA providers are seeking solutions to deliver better care at lower cost.

PRIMARY BENEFITS OF CHW PROGRAMS

A robust CHW program can help alleviate the burden on clinical providers

- CHWs are trustworthy individuals who share life experiences with their patients and support patients in their communities, where social challenges that affect health are often experienced. CHWs expand the reach of clinicians by targeting patients' health-related social needs that stretched clinicians typically are left to address.
- 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 can act as a liaison between health/social services and partner with medical teams to support a "whole person" approach to care. Through this role, CHWs help strengthen healthcare teams' effectiveness and improve service delivery quality and cultural competence.



CHW programs can offer a strong return on investment for health care providers

- CHWs can drive health and cost improvement, while freeing up providers to focus on clinical care and reimbursable activities.
- CHWs are instrumental in reducing hospitalizations: Clients receiving care from CHWs had 28% fewer hospitalizations. Data from three randomized clinical trials across multiple settings show that a standardized CHW intervention reduced total hospital days and hospitalizations outside the primary health system
- CHWs are well suited to address the transitions from hospital to home or intermediate care and adherence between clinic visits, which is especially important for vulnerable populations. Studies found that pairing insured inpatient adults with CHWs reduced readmissions and missed outpatient visits 30 days post-discharge.
- CHWs can lead to enhanced provider job satisfaction by helping to streamline work practices and improve efficiency. Providers say that CHWs reduced their overall workload and created space to deliver more comprehensive care.



Healthcare organizations can implement program integrity guardrails to ensure that organizational investments yield strong health and financial outcomes

- Evidence-based program standards support program effectiveness through integrity guardrails for core program elements such as recruitment and hiring, training, supervision, team integration, and data systems.
- Healthcare organizations seeking to standardize CHW services can use the National Committee for Quality Assurance's guidance on critical inputs for CHWs and the Virginia Community Health Worker Association's program standards roadmap.

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