

Grant Outcome Report

Supporting Standards and Financing for Community Health Workers

The Problem

Diabetes has become a major health crisis in New York State. Numerous studies have shown that community health workers (CHWs) can help patients improve their diabetes and other health outcomes, as well as reduce the use of resource-intensive services. CHWs play an important role in helping high-risk populations access and navigate fragmented health and social service systems, make positive changes in their behaviors, and adhere to complicated treatment regimens.

Despite the evidence supporting CHWs and the large number of trained CHWs in New York State (an estimated 11,000), the State's CHW workforce previously had lacked a standard scope of practice and sustainable funding streams. This inconsistency in how CHWs have been defined, trained, used, and funded has contributed to an inefficient use of resources, instability in the CHW field, and transient financing. Other states have made efforts to standardize the CHW field so that sustainable financing could be established.

The New York State Office of Health Insurance Programs previously had indicated a willingness to fund CHWs through Medicaid if there was a standard certification process and defined financing mechanisms. In January 2010, the New York State Health Foundation (NYSHealth) awarded a grant to Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health (Mailman School) to develop recommendations on standards, certification, and financing for CHWs in New York State. This work was conducted through a partnership between Mailman School and the Community Health Worker Network of New York City (the Network).

Grant Activities and Outcomes

The three-part aim of the Affordable Care Act—improving quality of care, increasing access to care, and reducing costs—presented unique opportunities for this project to raise the profile of CHWs in the State and include the CHW workforce in discussions on evolving health reform innovations, such as health homes, patient-centered medical homes, and accountable care organizations.

In their efforts to advance the CHW workforce in New York State, Mailman School and the Network had four

KEY INFORMATION:

GRANTEE

Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health

GRANT TITLE

Advancing and Sustaining the Community Health Worker Field in New York State

DATES

January 2010–September 2012

GRANT AMOUNT

\$490,363

FUNDING

Improving Diabetes Prevention and Management

primary goals:

1. Raise the profile and visibility of CHWs;
2. Establish standards for the role and scope of practice of CHWs in New York State;
3. Recommend a statewide credentialing process for CHWs; and
4. Identify stable financing streams and mechanisms for CHWs.

During the first year of the project, the Network and Mailman School formed the New York State Community Health Worker Initiative (the Initiative), which in turn established a leadership advisory group made up of CHWs and other key stakeholders. Mailman School and the Network also supported the development of a statewide CHW federation through local grassroots organizing and organizational support for emerging CHW groups in Western New York. Both the Community Health Workers Association of Rochester and the Network agreed to move forward with forming a statewide association, recruiting colleagues from neighboring regions, including Buffalo, Ithaca, and Syracuse. The formation of a statewide CHW association was announced at the Initiative's first statewide CHW conference in October 2011. Mailman School and the Network also provided support to the leadership advisory group, including a statewide survey of 226 CHWs and 44 CHW employers so as to ascertain the views of New Yorkers on CHW scope of practice, training, and financing.

During the project's second year, the leadership advisory group formed three CHW workgroups to address objectives and activities in three main areas: (1) scope of practice, (2) training and credentialing, and (3) financing.



The scope of practice workgroup was charged with developing a set of standards that outlines the roles that CHWs perform. Scope of practice was reached by a consensus and developed through extensive research, interviews, collaboration, and broad participation by representatives of all relevant CHW stakeholder sectors, including CHW leadership from within New York State. The results of the scope of practice analysis were published in the *American Journal of Public Health* (November 2011).

The training and credentialing workgroup used the research conducted by the scope of practice workgroup, existing literature, and lessons learned from other states to recommend statewide standards for the content, training methods, and appropriate siting for CHW training. Because of the ongoing New York State Medicare redesign process, implementation of a statewide credentialing process for CHWs

was unlikely during this time. The leadership advisory group therefore concentrated on developing recommendations for appropriate credentialing processes and training.

The finance workgroup identified potential financing models and created recommendations for financing CHWs in various settings, including Medicaid/Medicare, commercial insurance, private philanthropies, government, health care providers, and employers.

Together, the workgroups and project staff put together a comprehensive set of recommendations for the State to advance the CHW workforce in the report, "Paving a Path to Advance the Community Health Worker Workforce in New York State," which was widely disseminated across the State and nationally. The project team attended numerous professional conferences, including the American Public Health Association's annual conference, to present its findings and inform the work of others. Mailman School and the Network also held a statewide CHW conference in October 2011 and participated in the New York Health Home Learning Collaborative in September 2012. The formal recommendations were sent out to every member of the New York State Assembly and Senate (with special attention to the chairs of health, education, and higher education committees), as well as to the Governor.

The Future

This project helped advance the CHW workforce in New York State in a way that preserves the integrity and traditions of CHW work. The published recommendations have been well received and have generated significant interest among all CHW stakeholder sectors and across the country. This report has served as a guide for numerous states interested in advancing the CHW workforce.

Mailman School and the Network have worked to implement the report's recommendations in various settings, continuing their CHW workforce development efforts. They have also continued their ongoing efforts to locate and organize CHWs in other parts of the State to expand the statewide CHW association.

Numerous health system developers have consulted the report's recommendations as they endeavor to integrate CHWs into emerging health reform innovations, such as health homes, patient-centered medical homes, and accountable care organizations.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

ABOUT THE GRANTEE

Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health pursues an agenda of education, research, and service to address the critical and complex public health issues affecting New Yorkers, the nation, and the world. The Mailman School addresses today's health challenges through a broad lens, creating public health programs that can serve as models to be replicated across the country and around the world in order to reach large numbers of people with life-saving interventions. Located in Washington Heights in northern Manhattan, the Mailman School has been a partner in the community for decades. The Mailman School works with diverse populations throughout the City's five boroughs on HIV/AIDS education, prevention, and care; smoking cessation initiatives; school-based clinics; and programs to stem the growing asthma epidemic in our urban environment.

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