

Issue Brief #8 – Community Health Workers Initiative

Developing a training and certification program for community health workers (CHW) is one of the six initiatives specified in the Connecticut Healthcare Innovation Plan. The breadth of what CHWs can do and are doing across the country is enormous. For SIM, our focus is on what they can do for the effectiveness of Advanced Medical Homes (AMHs) and prevention centers. There is mounting evidence that CHWs as members of care teams and prevention centers as envisioned in our plan can improve health and clinical outcomes, and reduce health disparities by supporting the provision of more culturally and linguistically appropriate care, and care that takes into consideration economic and social circumstances. Drawn primarily from the communities they serve, CHWs can help people (1) to navigate health care and social supports, (2) to work with professionals in the effective self-management of chronic illnesses such as asthma and diabetes, and (3) and to adopt strategies for more healthful living. Within AMHs or advanced networks, CHWs are more likely to be generalists—addressing the broad needs of individuals who are complex clinically and whose circumstances are complicated; whereas within prevention centers, CHWs are more likely to specialize in, for example, diabetes prevention.

The proposed initiative is a collaboration between Connecticut’s Area Health Education Centers (AHEC) and four community colleges from Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (ConnSCU): Gateway Community College, Housatonic Community College, Capital Community College and Charter Oak Community College.

The four community colleges have developed or are developing programs with funding from the US Department of Labor. Being community college programs, they will provide entry to education in all the clinical professions and allied health professions. Gateway matriculated its first class this May; the other community colleges will begin their programs over the next year.

The community colleges are coordinating their programs with a program being developed by Central AHEC at UCHC and Southwestern AHEC. Some years ago, AHEC had a short-term CHW training program that was supported by a modest grant. AHEC is updating this program, working closely with Massachusetts AHEC, which is widely considered to have the benchmark CHW training program. Working with and within communities, AHEC’s program will be more approachable and accessible for people who do not see themselves in an academic setting or who cannot manage the logistics of academic programs due to family and job commitments. AHEC will need SIM testing grant dollars to develop and operate its program. The work plan for AHEC’s program is outlined below.

AHEC and the community colleges are working closely together. The community colleges are reaching out to people who have no expectation of higher education. AHEC will assist. AHEC will also encourage its students to seek more specialized or advanced training at the community colleges. Both the community college programs and AHEC’s program will seek to provide academic credit for their courses through the *prior learning assessment* (PLA) process, which is, within Connecticut State Colleges and Universities, the responsibility of Charter Oak CC, a participant in the CHW initiative. The community colleges and AHEC will be reaching out to prospective employers and will tailor their offerings to meet the stated needs of individual and classes of employers by establishing elective training modules that address the skills and knowledge these employers want. To help determine the contents of the programs, Southwestern AHEC is sponsoring an inventory of the CHWs currently working in Connecticut: who they are, where they are working and what they are doing. Both the community colleges and AHEC plan to grant certificates for the successful completion of their courses.

Activities Time Frame for AHEC's program:

Pre-Award (7/1/14-6/30/15)

- Identify and convene partner meetings – educational, community, public health and healthcare partners to identify roles and opportunities for collaboration.
- Engage CHW experts from Mass., Texas and Maryland to assist with training assessment and plan for the implementation of the CT AHEC Network “Boot Camp” core competency training and layering of “specialty” training provided by the community colleges and state universities.
- Engage leadership of CHW Association of CT as a partner in developing CHW Workforce development plan.
- Inventory CHW roles in state agencies.
- Identify PCMH models in CT utilizing CHWs as team members and focus on roles/responsibilities and payment mechanism.
- Develop description CT CHW Advisory Board structure, purpose and member responsibility. Create nomination/vetting process for potential members.

Year 1 (7/1/15 – 6/30/16)

- Work with Central Mass AHEC and the Community Health Worker Learning network to update and finalize CT AHEC Network Boot Camp core competency training. Goal of training 60 – 80 CHWs.
- Work with Community Colleges and the BOR in developing credit bearing CHW programs.
- Develop trainings regarding:
 - “CHWs as part of the Primary Care Team” for CHWs to learn the particulars of working with a clinical setting, and how to best act as the healthcare extender in the community.
 - “How to Primary Care Practices Utilize CHWs effectively” – training developed and offered to practices throughout the state.
- Develop the Employer base for Community Health Workers:
 - Qualitative needs assessment of employers to identify training needs for them to utilize CHWs.
 - Host Conference to bring Employers and CHWs together to learn about how they can work together most effectively (e.g. speed dating) – Outcome = CHWs and Employers have better understanding of each other's roles and relationships are built
 - Develop a list of employers who are interested in hiring CHWs (Target is 30)
 - Look for funding to do assess and evaluate the new CHW and Employer relationships
 - Investigate Apprenticeship programs for CHWs
- Market and Educate the medical community and CBOs about CHWs.
- Establish CT CHW Advisory Board.
- Inventory potential funding mechanisms for CHW Training post-SIM funding.

- Identify and integrate program evaluation of CHW Training.

Year 2 (7/1/16-6/30/17)

- CT AHEC Network Boot Camp trains 100 CHWs.
- Identify policies and recommendations for payment for CHW services.
- Inventory and update Internship/Job Shadowing/Preceptor site database and clearing house
- Distribute Skills based assessment for CHW Certification showcasing best practices state-wide.
- Support on-going trainings CHWs as part of the Primary Care Team and Utilization of CHWS in Primary Care Practices
- Working with Community Colleges and the BOR inventory credit bearing CHW programs
- Host annual conference for Employers and CHWs featuring best practices and outcomes.
- Identify potential funding mechanisms for CHW Training and develop strategy for securing funding
- On-going CHW Training evaluation (CHWs, community based agencies, medical community, educational partners).

Year 3 (7/1/17-6/30/18)

- CT AHEC Boot Camp trains 100 CHWs
- Update policies and recommendations for payment for CHW services
- Update Internship/Job Shadowing/Preceptor site database and clearing house
- Distribute Skills based assessment for CHW Certification showcasing best practices state-wide.
- Support on-going trainings CHWs as part of the Primary Care Team and Utilization of CHWS in Primary Care Practices
- Working with Community Colleges and the BOR evaluate impact of credit bearing CHW programs as a component of CHW Workforce development
- Host annual conference for Employers and CHWs featuring best practices and outcomes.
- Secure funding mechanisms for CHW Training post SIM
- On-going CHW Training evaluation.