

Community Health Workers in Minnesota

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN – 2024 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Background

In 2023, the Minnesota State legislature allocated funding (Sec. 144.1462 MN Statutes) to support collaboration and coordination between state and community partners to develop, refine, and expand the community health worker (CHW) profession in Minnesota; equip CHWs to address health needs; and to improve health outcomes.

One component of this work includes an environmental scan conducted by the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) to understand current CHW workforce measures, successful models, and barriers and facilitators in Minnesota outlined in this document.

Key findings

Minnesota has a robust infrastructure in place to support the CHW profession, including:

- Statewide scope of practice
- Academic CHW Certificate training program and upskilling trainings
- Medical billing and reimbursement
- MN CHW Alliance (MNCHWA), a non-profit who builds community and systems capacity for better health through integration of CHW strategies.
- Collaboration between state agencies, CHWs, CHW employer organizations, and MNCHWA.

There are opportunities to strengthen and expand effective CHW services statewide:

- Increase funding and sustainability for CHW positions.
- Support employer readiness and capacity.
- Advance CHW training, support, and career development.
- Establish state strategy and coordination.

Presence of CHWs

- There are currently **six higher education programs** offering the CHW certificate program.
- There are **1,371 CHWs who have obtained a certificate from a Minnesota higher education program** in the past two decades, according to data reported to the Minnesota Office of Higher Education by the 10 CHW certificate programs that have existed.
- The Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development estimates there are **880 CHWs currently working in the state.**
- **In 47 counties, CHW services are provided across as least 11 settings**, including community organizations, local health departments, managed care plans, mental-health centers, long-term care facilities, and health systems.
- Currently, **209 CHWs** are enrolled with Minnesota Department of Human Services to bill for CHW services and it is estimated that a much smaller number of CHWs have billed claims as a rendering provider in the past two years.

Barriers to CHW program development, employment, and sustainability

- Organizational readiness, training, supervision, retention, and funding are themes that emerged through key informant interviews.
- Themes included low salary levels, availability of fulltime work, supervision, and ongoing support to navigate internal organization dynamics.
- Documentation is consistently noted as a challenge for CHW workflows as well as for program evaluation and billing.
- Common barriers to implementing an apprenticeship on the job training model included existing supervisor/administrative staff capacity, time and funding, and general awareness of the training model.
- Funding and sustainable financing is an ongoing barrier that has impacts on retention.
- Reimbursement rates do not support the full cost to fund CHW positions.

*"CHWs not only provide education to the community, but give education to providers on cultural, system barriers, and lived experiences of patients."
- CHW supervisor*

Facilitators and components of successful CHW employment

- Preparing the organization ahead of hiring a CHW was regularly noted to help ease entry and integration to the team.
- Internal advocacy tools to increase awareness and value of the CHW role are important for retention and sustainable braided funding.
- Connection to and integration with colleagues was identified across settings as a successful strategy.
- Reflective practice was highlighted as a positive supervisory tool to support CHWs and debrief work experiences.
- Continuing education or specialty trainings offered consistently, via MN CHW Alliance, national organizations, or MDH online learning modules, are valued by employers.
- Building employment levels to allow for professional growth in the field contributes to sustainability.

What's next?

MDH, in partnership with MNCHWA, will be engaging with CHWs and CHW stakeholders across the state to advance facilitators and address barriers through development of a sustainable plan for infrastructure that supports the varied needs of communities in MN.

For more information, visit health.mn.gov/chw.

Contact us: health.chw.mdh@state.mn.us