

SB23-002: Expand Access to Community Health Workers: Address Health Disparities and Contribute to Lower Healthcare Costs

Community Health Workers link communities to health and social programs to promote access to services and improve the quality and cultural responsiveness of care delivery. By building a sustainable financial pathway to expand access to Community Health Workers, they will continue to reduce health disparities, improve health outcomes, and lower healthcare costs for Coloradans.

Who are Community Health Workers (CHWs)?

Community Health Worker is an umbrella term for lay public health workers who may go by many names (Patient Navigators, Promotores de Salud); the names are as diverse as the communities, sites and roles in which CHWs serve. CHWs typically deliver health education on topics including preventive services and chronic disease management, support patients in navigating the healthcare system, and accessing community based-services to address social determinants of health.

What benefit do CHW's bring to the communities and systems they serve?

- In Colorado, cancer, diabetes, and heart disease are in the top 10 leading causes of death for Coloradans.¹ Evidence supporting the involvement of CHWs in the prevention and management of costly chronic diseases is well-established. The Community Heart Health Actions for Latinos At Risk-Program (CHARLAR) in Colorado demonstrated effectiveness with CHWs supporting participants in lowering blood pressure, addressing risk factors like cholesterol and weight management and improving dietary behaviors.
- Asthma is one of the most common chronic illnesses among children in the United States. Research has shown that a CHW home visiting program for asthma management for youth improved outcomes by decreasing hospitalizations, less missed school days and improvement in quality of life measures.²
- Evidence shows that CHWs can help improve healthcare access and outcomes, strengthen healthcare teams and enhance quality of life for people in low-income, underserved and diverse communities.³ The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services recognizes that CHWs can play an integral part in achieving health equity and categorizes their use in various disease prevention and control programs as evidence-based. Many interventions that integrate CHWs into health care delivery and public health systems are associated with reductions in chronic illnesses, better medication adherence, increased patient involvement, improvements in overall community health and reduced healthcare costs.⁵
- Researchers in Pennsylvania found that Community Health Workers yielded Medicaid a return of **\$2.47 for every dollar invested**, realized within a single fiscal year.⁴

Support SB23-002

Expanding access to CHWs for patients and community members is crucial to achieving health equity. This bill provides a step towards sustainably expanding access to CHWs, improving health outcomes, and realizing cost savings. As Colorado strives to solve for major workforce challenges in healthcare and public health, policy solutions that expand access to CHWs can also help build workforce capacity. Currently, 25 other states allow for Medicaid billing of CHW services.⁶

SB23-002 will enable Medicaid reimbursement for some of the services Community Health Workers provide by leveraging existing systems at the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. This model will be developed in partnership with CHWs, consumer advocates, public health agencies and healthcare providers to ensure successful implementation.

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Supporters of SB23-002 include:

- *The Alliance of Colorado Community Health Workers, Patient Navigators & Promotores De Salud*
- *American Academy of Pediatrics, Colorado Chapter*
- *Children’s Hospital Colorado*
- *Colorado Academy of Family Physicians*
- *Colorado Cancer Coalition*
- *Colorado Cross-Disability Coalition*
- *Colorado Community Health Network*
- *Colorado Consumer Health Initiative*
- *Colorado Association of Local Public Health Officials*
- *Colorado Hospital Association*
- *Chronic Care Collaborative*
- *Cultivando*
- *The Delta Dental of Colorado Foundation*
- *Eagle Valley Behavioral Health*
- *Healthier Colorado*
- *National Association of Latino Healthcare Executives, Colorado Chapter*
- *Project Protect Food Systems Workers*
- *Trailhead Institute*

- Supporter list in progress -