

# Community and Healthcare Linkages

## Community of Practice

### BACKGROUND

Community health workers (CHWs) are a vital component of the state and national public health workforce. “Community health worker” is an umbrella term for a number of different job titles, including community health advocates, outreach educators, peer leaders, promotores de salud, doulas, and patient navigators. CHWs improve access to and increase utilization of primary health care, reduce costs of care, improve quality of care, and reduce health disparities. They serve as a bridge between traditionally underserved populations and needed health and social services. CHWs often assist in chronic disease prevention and management, and work across public health such as maternal and child health, HIV/AIDS, diabetes, substance abuse, asthma and others. Key CHW roles include outreach, health education, client advocacy and empowerment, as well as health system navigation. CHWs are distinguished from other health professionals because they are hired primarily for their special connection to and understanding of the populations and communities they serve, conduct outreach a significant portion of the time, and have experience providing services in community settings. This CoP works to identify strategies to include community health workers in reimbursement policies of payers, and to find appropriate ways to assist employers, trainers, and other stakeholders in understanding the critical role CHWs can and will play in the shifting health care landscape across the Commonwealth and the nation.

### OBJECTIVE BY 2017

Increase the integration and sustainability of community health workers in both clinical and community settings, and in making linkages between the two. Strengthen CHW workforce development to meet the needs of emerging models of health care delivery and payment.

### PRIORITY STRATEGIES

The CoP has identified the following best practice models to achieve the CoP objective:

- Identify and promote effective strategies to include CHW reimbursement by payers;
- Identify and promote effective strategies to build capacity and infrastructure for employers, trainers, and the workforce, so that CHWs can be effectively integrated into the changing health system.

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