



UNIVERSAL HEALTH CARE
FOUNDATION OF CONNECTICUT

**Testimony in Support of
Senate Bill 126: An Act Concerning Community Health Workers
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Universal Health Care Foundation of Connecticut supports Senate Bill 126: An Act Concerning Community Health Workers. We stand with Health Equity Solutions' position, as well as the others here to testify in support of this bill.

While there are many uncertainties in health care, one thing remains constant – we must continue to strive towards improving health care so that everyone has access to high-quality, affordable health care. That equation must always consider health equity in all its forms. A large part of health equity is remedying health *inequities* by directly addressing them.

Community Health Workers are an integral part to delivering health care that is equitable, and are an important resource for all communities, particularly those who are at higher risk of poor health outcomes.

What are Community Health Workers?

Community Health Workers (CHWs) are the health care professionals who connect individuals with their care. CHWs fill a wide range of roles, with one unified mission – to ensure that people have the supports they need to lead healthier lives. CHWs educate diabetes patients on diets can help them stay healthy, ensure that people take their medications, coordinate care for those with chronic or complex conditions, are part of the communities they serve, speak to people in their own language, understand the culture of their patients, and so much more.

What's the need for CHWs?

More and more, we are shifting to paying health care providers for improving health outcomes, not just providing care. This can be challenging for providers, who traditionally have delivered health care within their facilities. It can also be challenging because patients may need help in following doctor's orders, taking their medications, getting to appointments, changing their behavior, or even simply understanding what they can do to improve their health. This means that providers need ways to stay in touch with their patients, and support them in their care. Community Health Workers are a cost-effective way to create that link between the provider and the patient.

This work is not new in Connecticut. The State Innovation Model (SIM) work includes a Community Health Workers Advisory Council to help integrate existing Community Health Workers into payment and delivery system reform. They are also looking at ways to grow the CHW workforce, so that more people in Connecticut can be supported in their health care. All that work needs support, though – and a way to make sure it is sustainable in the long run, so that Connecticut residents can reap the rewards of better health through this cost-effective intervention.

Community Health Workers are already making an impact in Connecticut. For example:

- Connecticut Children's Medical Center uses CHWs as home visitors for Hartford Latino and African-American families in their obesity prevention program Steps to Growing Up Healthyⁱ
- CHWs known as patient navigators have improved health, quality of life and access to care at Project Access of New Havenⁱⁱ

A few important facts about CHWs

A July 2015 Connecticut Health Foundation policy brief, *Tomorrow's Health Care System Needs Community Health Workers: A Policy Agenda for Connecticut*, highlights that:

- *CHWs engage patients in their communities, extending health care beyond the clinic walls.*
- *Research shows that CHWs can improve health outcomes and contain costs.*
- *CHWs can help clinical practices meet new quality standards and earn higher payments from health plans.*
- *New federal rules make it easier for state Medicaid programs to pay for CHW services.*
- *Connecticut can enact legislation to develop a credentialing process for CHWs and integrate CHWs into the state health care workforce.*
- *Integrating CHWs into Connecticut's delivery and payment systems will improve sustainability for their vital services.*

What can the legislature do about it?

As State Senators and Representatives, you can enact legislation – specifically, this one, Senate Bill 126 – that establishes a way to certify CHWs that includes training and experience requirements, which documents CHWs' skills for providers, as well as for both private and public insurers. This would allow CHWs to fully integrate into the existing health care system by ensuring the sustainability of their invaluable service, and ensure the highest quality of care.

It is time for Community Health Workers to be recognized for the high-value, low-cost services they provide, and for all communities that need CHWs have them.

CHWs: Supporting health equity, improving health outcomes, without breaking the bank

There is no one easy solution for making health care more affordable. There are many players, many stakeholders, and many factors affecting our health. Affordable health care requires a coordinated approach with interconnected measures. Recognizing the important role of CHWs, and providing a path to certification, is one such measure. If we can improve the health of Connecticut residents, without breaking the bank, why wouldn't we?

Universal Health Care Foundation of Connecticut's mission is to serve as a catalyst that engages residents and communities in shaping a democratic health system that provides universal access to quality, affordable health care and promotes health in Connecticut. We believe that health care is a fundamental right and that our work is part of a broader movement for social and economic justice.

ⁱ See Connecticut Health Foundation's policy brief, *Tomorrow's Health Care System Needs Community Health Workers: A Policy Agenda for Connecticut* (July 2015)

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