



Illinois Community Health Workers Certification

Consensus Statement

In light of recent events in this country and around the world it has never been clearer that systemic racism, poverty, and inequitable access to resources have resulted in deep and unacceptable disparities in health and health care. In Illinois our health and human services system continues to perpetuate these health disparities among Illinoisians of color, of all ages, genders, and socioeconomic status.

A growing body of research and policy supports the integration of community health workers (CHWs) into health systems to improve health outcomes in underserved communities. Community Health Workers are frontline public health workers who are trusted members of, or have an unusually close understanding of, the community being served. Our most recent example of the critical impact of community health workers is the vital role CHWs have continued to play during the ongoing pandemic.

The Illinois Community Health Workers Association (ILCHWA)[®] is a statewide 501c3 membership based organization created to support, educate and promote the CHW workforce in Illinois. We are the only organization that represents and serves as the unifying voice for Illinois CHWs. We fight tirelessly for the recognition, sustainability, and advancement of CHWs, including Promotores de Salud, CHRs, Patient Navigators, Health Educators, home visitors, and other similar roles. In addition to the CHWs themselves, other strategic stakeholders partner and collaborate with ILCHWA, including state agencies, political advocates, educational institutions, professional associations, FQHC's, hospitals, clinics, payers, foundations, and community based organizations.

Illinois has built a foundation over the past two decades to expand the role of community health workers in health promotion and prevention of disease. Yet, according to the Illinois CHW Advisory Board Report (2016), our state still lacks some of the underlying policies, systems, and infrastructure to integrate CHWs effectively into our health and social service systems. We must develop a strong and supportive infrastructure to ensure the sustainability of this critical workforce and strengthen the depth and breadth of their impact.

To ensure an equitable and effective system to increase and sustain the integration of CHWs in Illinois, the development of CHW policies, structures and processes must be led by and include representation of the CHW workforce. ***"Nothing about us without us."***

Our newly drafted Community Health Worker Certification and Reimbursement Act proposes the creation of the Illinois Community Health Worker Certification Board within the Department of Public Health.

- This Board will act through **shared leadership** with “a statewide association representing community health workers.”
- The Act proposes a **collaboration with this entity** and other state educational Boards, to adopt a process to approve and certify community-based and academic-based training programs that students can attend to obtain individual community health worker certification.
- This Board shall have **balanced representation** from the community health worker workforce, community health worker employers, community health worker training and educational organizations, and other engaged stakeholders.

The undersigned individuals and organizations affirm that ILCHWA is the organization that represents the CHW workforce in Illinois, and furthermore, that ILCHWA be in the lead or in collaboration with other stakeholders for any aspects of CHW work in Illinois, including training, certification, financing and reimbursement, and workforce development.