



**Ohio Commission of Minority Health Funding:
Panel on the Certified Pathways Community HUB Model
to Reduce Infant Mortality and Address Health Disparities**

**Jan L. Ruma, Vice President, Hospital Council of Northwest Ohio, and
Director, Northwest Ohio Pathways HUB**

Good afternoon Chairman Romanchuk, Ranking Minority Member West, and esteemed members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services. I am Jan Ruma, and I serve as the Vice President of The Hospital Council of Northwest Ohio and the Director of the Northwest Ohio Pathways HUB.

Thank you for allowing me to provide information to support increasing funding to the Ohio Commission of Minority Health to help bring the certified Pathways Community HUB model to scale in Ohio communities that are experiencing the highest rates of infant mortality.

For 13 years, I've served as the founding director of the Northwest Ohio Pathways HUB, a program of the Hospital Council of Northwest Ohio. The Council is a regional hospital association that works with the community to improve health. There is consensus among our membership that the only way we are going to improve community health is to reduce disparities. The evidence-based Pathways Community HUB model was adopted because it provides an accountable framework for all sectors of the community to work together to reduce duplication, leverage resources, and address the social determinants of health. The model creates an organized, outcome-focused network of care coordination agencies that hire and train community health workers (CHWs) to make confirmed connections to community and clinical resources to improve health and well-being. A certified Pathways Community HUB improves health, reduces costs, and promotes equity.

The Northwest Ohio Pathways HUB was one of the first three certified Pathways HUBs in the United States and the first certified HUB in Ohio. As the largest operating HUB in the country, we contract with 19 health, social service, and community organizations – including hospitals, minority-focused organizations, faith-based organizations and homeless shelters – that employ 45 CHWs. These CHWs work primarily with at-risk pregnant women to address health and health-related social needs. Care coordination is paid for through contracts with all five Ohio Medicaid managed care plans and other funders. The Ohio Commission of Minority Health has championed our HUB's development, as well as the development of the HUB network statewide, through funding and technical assistance.

You get what you pay for. At least 50% of the payments made to care coordination agencies in the HUB model are tied to outcomes. This drives organizations to solve problems, not just go through the process. The HUB drives the achievement of health outcomes that align with Medicaid quality standards.

The key to the HUB model is community health workers. In Ohio, CHWs are certified through the Ohio Board of Nursing and require a high school diploma or GED, a certificate course, a practicum, and an acceptable background check. CHWs often are from the community they serve and have overcome the same struggles their clients experience, and we expand their skills through the provision of cultural competency training. CHWs are partners, coaches and advocates for their clients. They use the approach, “Do For, Do with, and Cheer on!” in helping their clients become self-sufficient.

Certified Pathways HUBs expand and diversify Ohio’s workforce. There are more than 125 Ohio Board of Nursing certified CHWs working through the five (5) certified Pathways Community HUBs in Akron, Cincinnati, Mansfield, Toledo, and Youngstown that receive funding support from the Ohio Commission of Minority Health. More than 50% of these HUB CHWs represent minority groups, more than 40% were unemployed before becoming a CHW, and about 10% of HUB CHWs are former HUB clients.

Because the HUB is focused on the outcome – or connecting people to needed medical and social services – it facilitates partnerships with local housing authorities, public transportation, job and family services, and local employers to develop a fast-track for HUB clients. When a HUB develops solutions to these system barriers, it doesn’t just benefit the clients of one agency, but it benefits the clients of all agencies connected to the HUB, which creates efficiencies. Communities are drawn to the HUB model because of this — and we need your support.

In the case in the Northwest Ohio Pathways HUB, we find that connections for housing and transportation resources are the hardest to complete. Affordable options and assistance programs for safe housing and transportation tend to have long waiting lists, or our clients do not meet the varied income and program requirements.

Lack of transportation results in missed doctor appointments, missed work, inability to access basic needs for families, and lack of access to healthy foods. The Baby and Me Ride Free program was developed by the Northwest Ohio Pathways HUB in partnership with TARTA, our public transit system, for pregnant women and guardians of children up to age 1 enrolled in any maternal and child home visitation program. Baby and Me Ride Free participants secure a free annual bus pass and access to paratransit door-to-door services. This program provides transportation to work, improving financial stability for families and workplace retention for employers.

To address the inability to complete housing connections, the Northwest Ohio Pathways HUB partnered with the Lucas Metropolitan Housing Authority to prioritize housing choice vouchers for pregnant women. All vouchers designated were issued in the first year of the program, and more are in the pipeline. We are also working with the City of Toledo to secure tenant-based rental assistance for pregnant women, and housing assistance is now available through the Ohio Department of Health Infant Vitality Pilot Program.

Each certified HUB has demonstrated that HUB clients, who have on average 6 risk factors for poor health outcomes, have health outcomes similar or better than the health of the county where they live. This improvement is attributed to the support HUB clients receive from their CHWs, as well as the community resources aligned through the HUB to address the social determinants of health. In Northwest Ohio, we have seen improvements in full-term, healthy birth weight babies among our clients. Additionally, more of our clients are attending their prenatal care and post-partum visits, and we are measuring a lower infant mortality rates than the county overall.

Ohio Pathways Community HUBs will only have to prevent 40 neonatal intensive care nursery stays to fund a three-million-dollar budget for the Ohio Commission of Minority Health. By investing in the Ohio Commission of Minority Health to further the expansion of the Certified Pathways Community HUB model to all at-risk pregnant women, all of Ohio babies can celebrate their first birthday and beyond.

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