



Testimony Senate Finance Committee

Thursday, June 8th, 2023

Chairman Dolan, Ranking Member Sykes and Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

My name is Paul Isherwood. I am the Director of the COAD Pathways HUB. Our Hub, which covers fifteen counties in Southeast Ohio, supports the work of partner agencies who provide Community Health Worker (CHW) services using the nationally recognized and Ohio-developed Pathways Community HUB model. Our HUB is based at the Corporation for Ohio Appalachian Development, a longstanding entity with a proven record in bringing support to the people of Appalachian Ohio through direct services and the Community Action network it supports. I am providing this testimony today to respectfully ask for the restoration of the Center for Community Health Worker Excellence (CCHWE) and its appropriation in Am. Sub. HB 33. This funding provided for an important first step in building statewide recognition and support for the important work of CHWs as our state works to improve the health and sustainability of our communities. The appropriation provided for \$5 million each year of the biennium to develop a public-private partnership with a Board of Directors representing a broad range of interests in ensuring that CHWs receive the attention and support they need.

Unlike other initiatives designed to connect our most at-risk community members with the support and care they need to thrive, Community Health Workers are deliberately drawn from the communities they are enlisted to help. The pathway to a career as a CHW has never been more open, as various institutions across the state are providing the necessary training to become licensed as a CHW. Increasingly, health care providers, from Managed Care Organizations to private hospitals to community health centers, are turning to CHWs as a vital cog in the effort to improve the healthcare metrics of our most devastated communities in Ohio. The role of the CHW is to help individuals navigate the complexities of their life situations, provide broad care coordination by mitigating not only health but also social risks, all while helping individuals meet goals and achieve better outcomes in a positive, collaborative way.

Currently, there are over 1,000 CHWS operating in the state. Approximately half of them work within the structure of a Pathways Community HUB like the one that I have the honor of leading. Developed in Ohio by Drs. Mark and Sarah Redding, the Pathways Community HUB model has grown profoundly in recent years, from 9 HUBs in 2019 to 12 today, serving the overwhelming majority of our counties. The Pathways model has since spread to states including New York, Michigan, Texas, and California. One key aspect of the model, which provides an outcome-based incentivized approach, is its ability to provide a sustainable funding basis for the continued employment of CHWS and the delivery of the services they offer. The growth of this model in the state has come about in no small part through the action of the General Assembly, in particular your fellow members in the Senate, in supporting the Ohio Commission on Minority Health and their mission.

Through the Pathways Community HUB model, our CHWS are trained to work with at-risk community members to identify individually modifiable risk factors – the various social and behavioral challenges that undermine their health and ability to thrive. The CHWs identify various “Pathways” they use to mitigate and hopefully eliminate these risks. Examples of Pathways include Adult Education, Family



Planning, Housing, Pregnancy, Substance Use, and Transportation. Through the work of CHWs, people are engaging the social services and healthcare networks in their neighborhoods that they otherwise would have avoided. People are getting connected to mental health services and finding better jobs. People are getting support for their utility bills and avoiding mounting debts and other issues related to non-payment of bills. People are returning to education and building better lives for themselves and their families. People are undergoing screening processes at preventative healthcare appointments instead of waiting to receive costly and difficult care at an emergency room crisis. People are learning about various ways to make their lives more secure and successful with the help of a trusted community member who understands and empathizes with their struggles. This is the daily work of Community Health Workers.

As the field of Community Health Workers grows in numbers and importance, both inside and outside of Pathways HUBs, the need for a centralized support network to shepherd the development of CHWs as a valued and sustained workforce is crucial. This network is what the Center for Community Health Worker Excellence offers. In spite of the wonderful support and leadership of the Ohio Board of Nursing, CHWs have a multitude of overlapping and competing support structures. As a result, our CHWs often do not know where to turn when looking for advice on how to grow and develop within their own field. In spite of the huge growth in the number of CHWs and the broad agreement in the healthcare field that CHWS play a vital role in tackling the social determinants of health challenges in Ohio, there has not been a statewide study of the role of CHW in almost five years. We lack any form of accreditation or recognized training for CHW Supervisors, in itself an area of growing importance. In order to complete continuing education for certification, CHWs face difficulty in identifying formally approved training options. These deficiencies are effectively placing a roadblock on the future growth of our CHW workforce. They create impediments to the training and retention of the current workforce. As a result, the crucial gains made by CHWs in recent years are in danger of being lost unless we support them. This start of this support comes in the form of the CCHWE, which can begin the process of building the data systems needed to ensure accurate measuring of the work of CHWS, supporting standardized training and continuing education offerings to grow the field, and providing a recognized home for CHWs as they take their place in the effort to build a healthier Ohio.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Paul Isherwood

Director

COAD Pathways HUB

[www.coadinc.org](http://www.coadinc.org)