

Senate

Finance Committee

Community Action Akron Summit

2026-27 Budget Testimony

Friday, May 30, 2025

Good morning Chairman Huffman, Vice Chair Senator Johnson and Ranking Minority Member Senator Liston and esteemed members of the Senate Finance Committee.

On behalf of Community Action Akron Summit, this is presented by Malcolm J. Costa, President and CEO of Community Action and Dr. Aimee Budnik, Vice President of Community Services Programs. Mr. Costa has been President and CEO of Community Action for over 40 years. Dr. Budnik has a PhD in Prevention Science from the College of Public Health at Kent State University. Her research focuses on public health systems and services that examine the role of primary prevention and social determinants of health in communities. Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony about the Ohio Commission on Minority Health budget. In lieu of testifying in person, I am submitting this written testimony for consideration.

Community Action Akron Summit (CA) has been the designated lead agency (Akron and Summit County) to address poverty since 1964 with the mission to reduce poverty and promote self-sufficiency. The Commission requires each funded HUB to establish an advisory group to include program and community participants to provide input to program implementation.

This aligns with our long history of including participation of the poor and promoting economic opportunity, including all voices and individuals with lived experience in decision-making, and addressing social determinants of health.

In Summit County, social determinants of health contribute significantly to poor birth outcomes and infant mortality especially among African American families. Similar to statewide birth outcomes, reported by the Ohio Department of Children and Youth, Summit County also reflects disparities of 3 – 4.5 times higher for black infant mortality when compared to white infant mortality. Approximately 40% of the infant deaths are attributed to prematurity which correlates with Social Determinants of Health, stress and access to health care.

In 2015, countywide health leaders, agency and other community leaders researched evidenced-based models successful in reducing infant mortality and achieving equity in birth outcomes. The intensive research showed Pathways Community HUB as the evidence-based model with the greatest potential to reverse the disparate and historic trend in black infant mortality rates which was identified as the overarching goal within the State Health Improvement Plan.

CA has been an Ohio Commission on Minority Health grantee since January 2016 and was awarded funding to replicate the Pathways Community HUB model. Since that time, and as the result of OCHM funding, Pathways HUB Community Action has attained National Certification for the Pathways Community HUB Model, executed 7 Medicaid Managed Care Contracts for

reimbursement for CHWs' services rendered, trained over 100 CHWs and established a robust referral network, connecting pregnant women in need of services.

The Pathways Community HUB provides a single point of contact for individuals and families and Community Health Workers (CHWs) that coordinate evidence-based interventions to address the complex needs of the clients. The flow of information across the network via the data system creates efficiencies and reduces duplication because each family has one primary care coordinator. CHWs address the multitude of needs by opening and closing relevant pathways specific to the families' risk factors. CHWs maneuver through the complex systems in partnership with the clients and work to ensure the most critical needs are addressed. CHWs ensure that the necessary medical care, social supports and community resources are wrapped around families so that they may have the most successful birth outcomes.

Ohio Commission on Minority grant funding has enabled Community Action to develop a strong network of Care Coordination Agencies (CCAs) who employ CHWs and have contracted relationships with Pathways HUB Community Action. CCA expansion in the network increased the number of CHWs on the ground to engage and enroll more women into the HUB. The funding from the Commission has enabled Community Action to provide technical assistance and training that ensured model fidelity and adherence to the evidenced based standards as the network grew.

More recently, CA has published its results in two peer reviewed journals. The first article (Larwin, Budnik, Horne, 2023) demonstrated a 440% return on investment (ROI) for pregnant women that received Hubs services as compared to pregnant women that did not receive Hub services. This means that for every dollar invested, there is a \$4.40 return. The ROI study analyzed four years of birth data to calculate the cost savings for infants born to a mom that was enrolled in the Pathways HUB. The cost savings were based on actual costs from two Medicaid Managed Care plans and the March of Dimes Report in 2021. The cost savings due to lower premature births in Ohio were estimated at \$2,407,323. These results represent a significant savings for health systems, educational systems, medical care, and other community resources. The authors concluded "Public funding for infant mortality prevention reaps not only improved birth outcomes but financial rewards far exceeding the costs of investment, justifying further investment."

In addition, these recent ROI estimates were compared to data provided by Buckeye Health Plan study published in 2017. The Buckeye Health Plan study was a retrospective cohort study of over 3,700 deliveries from 2013-2017, focusing on the Toledo HUB conducted by Buckeye Health Plan. This study identified a \$2.36 return on investment for Medicaid recipients with per/member per/month cost savings for high, medium, and low risk members. In addition, the study highlighted that high-risk pregnant women in the HUB's area who did not participate in the HUB's services had a 1.55 times greater likelihood of having an infant that needed Special Nursery Care or Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) Services.

In the second study (Larwin and Larwin, 2023), five years of birth data was analyzed to examine the risk of a mother having a low birthweight or preterm infants. Results in this study revealed higher birth weights and gestational age for infants born to women enrolled in the program during the first trimester. In addition, approximately 86% of those enrolled mothers who reported a previous preterm birth gave birth to a full-term infant. Low birth weight infants were lower than

expected for 84% of the mothers. These results signal that the Pathways Community Hub is having impact on infant mortality in Summit County and across the state.

The authors concluded “Pathways HUB (PHCA) is providing needed support and assistance to at-risk pregnant women who are mitigating the likelihood of repeated preterm and low-weight births, therefore lowering the likelihood of infant mortality for their clients in Summit County.”

The Commission on Minority Health has been a strong partner in addressing infant mortality and has effectively created a network of learning for the Ohio HUBs. Their leadership to fund this national model and support communities to replicate the Pathways Community HUB has been significant and the potential to expand into additional populations is tremendous. The successes seen with the Pathways HUB Community Action are the in part due to the funding to support the replication, the rigorous grant requirements, and uniform approach to evaluation through Research Evaluation Enhancement Program (REEP). CA strongly endorses the continued funding of the Ohio Commission of Minority Health and its leadership to achieve Ohio’s overarching goal to improve birth outcomes.

Respectfully,

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