
Testimony in Support of Sustained Investment in the Ohio Center for Community Health Worker Excellence

Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the Senate Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in strong support of sustaining the funding for the Ohio Center for Community Health Worker Excellence (CCHWE).

My name is Peter Whitt. My career led me to cultivate and develop a CHW program in the early 2000s. I have witnessed and learned of the great value and benefit of CHW's in many areas including both urban and rural communities. I can remember speaking with a CHW at a conference in Biloxi Mississippi. She was from rural Texas and spoke about how simple functions that support health supported ambulances with more efficient responses by directing them to homes when they came into their community due to very limited street signs. This speaks to the value of CHW both in community and the healthcare ecosystem. The need for ongoing research and quality management that promotes and grow the work of CHW in Ohio is critical. The opportunity for Ohio to lead nationally is at the tipping point of this Center. Respectfully, our state has much work to do with the expansive nursing profession. Therefore, having CHW Center for Excellence will be most beneficial for maximum learning growth and impact the field both in Ohio and in the nation.

This state-supported initiative is and will be a significant cornerstone in developing and sustaining a resilient Community Health Worker (CHW) workforce across Ohio. CHWs are an indispensable part of the health and social ecosystem, especially embedded in rural and underserved communities—where they bridge longstanding gaps in access, to relevant services that enhance citizens' well-being that integrates across health, social and emotional well-being for families across the state of Ohio. A critical and cutting-edge opportunity for Ohio, to become a leader across the nation in this field stands in our view. Sustaining the current budget for the Ohio Center for Community Health Worker Excellence to lift this great work cultivates another cornerstone for a thriving Ohio.

The Evolution and Role of CHWs in Ohio

Community Health Workers have long served as trusted messengers, educators, advocates, and connectors within their communities. While their national footprint began as early as the 1960s, Ohio formally recognized their importance through Ohio Revised Code Section 4723.81 in 2003.

Today's CHWs are central in managing chronic conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, and mental health, especially in rural areas where provider shortages and health disparities are most acute. CHWs have demonstrated proven outcomes: reduced hospital admissions, improved patient compliance, and enhanced community health literacy. In states and nations with similar models—such as Muso Health in Mali and CRHP in India—CHWs have contributed to dramatic reductions in mortality and increased health system efficiency.

The Value of the Center for Community Health Worker Excellence

Established in 2023 with bipartisan support and an annual \$2.5 million allocation, the CCHWE exists to professionalize, support, and grow Ohio's CHW workforce. The Center has made impactful strides in a short time:

- **Training and Certification Access:** The Center supports community-based organizations and educational institutions to offer high-quality training, including hybrid and in-person practicum opportunities that meet CHWs where they are.
- **Financial Incentives:** CCHWE provides stipends and funding to employers who offer CHW placements and mentorship, directly addressing workforce shortages and burnout.
- **Workforce Infrastructure:** CCHWE coordinates a centralized resource hub offering continuing education, job listings, and mentorship programs while tracking key data metrics on CHW impact.
- **Policy Collaboration:** The Center actively partners with stakeholders across public and private sectors to embed CHWs into Ohio's health, housing, and behavioral health strategies.

Why Continued Investment Is Essential

Despite the progress, many CHWs—especially in rural and low-income urban settings—still lack stable employment pathways, professional support, and integration into broader health systems. Sustained investment in CCHWE will:

- Expand and ease certification pipelines and diversify the workforce.
- Enhance statewide data systems to track CHW impact.
- Foster innovation through CHW-led initiatives in maternal health, behavioral health, and public health emergency response.
- Maintain Ohio's leadership in community-based care delivery.

The Greater Cleveland Funders Collaborative and many philanthropic institutions have also endorsed ongoing support, recognizing the strategic importance of CHWs in addressing both health disparities and the social determinants of health.

Conclusion

The Center for Community Health Worker Excellence represents a forward-thinking, cost-effective investment in Ohio's health and human service infrastructure. As we aim to strengthen care delivery, support communities, and lower costs, CHWs are a vital part of the solution. Equally important, is the opportunity better learn and understand the impact of the work of CHW's including employment opportunities, scalable career pathways that build economic mobility to valuing the most trusted person from diverse communities that serve the same communities in which they live, work, play and worship

It is the GCFC hope that you will continuing to fund and expand the Center.

I respectfully urge the General Assembly to uphold and grow the state's commitment to the Center, reinforcing Ohio's leadership in community-rooted health and human service innovation.
