

Senate Health Committee

Community Action Akron Summit
22-23 Budget Testimony
Thursday, May 6, 2021

Chairman Huffman, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Minority Member Antonio, and esteemed members of the Senate Health 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, Pathways HUB Director. 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. Prior to her work at Community Action, Dr. Budnik was a local WIC Director and Director of Welfare and Social Services in Connecticut. These positions framed her doctoral studies at Kent State University. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony about the Ohio Commission on Minority Health budget.

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. “Maximum feasible participation” of the poor and has been the philosophy over our long history promoting economic opportunity, including all voices and individuals with lived experience in decision-making, and addressing Social Determinants of Health.

In Summit County, infant mortality is one indicator within which Social Determinants of Health contribute significantly to poor birth outcomes especially among African American families. In Summit County, disparities between white infant mortality and black infant mortality are 3-4.5 times with about 40% of the infant deaths 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 improving health equity in communities. The intensive research showed Pathways Community HUB as the evidence-based model with the greatest potential to impact this scourge.

CA has been an Ohio Commission on Minority Health grantee since January 2016. CA applied for the Pathways Community Hub Replication Grant upon being unanimously endorsed by Summit County Healthy Connections Network (HCN). HCN is a 20-year collaboration initiated by the Director of the Akron Health Department with all local health systems, the local FQHC, University of Akron, and every other significant health-related organizations, private or public in Summit County, whose mission is to provide 100% access, achieve zero disparities and ensure long standing safety net. The group voted to support the replication of the Pathways HUB; voting to contribute the entire HCN fund balance to CA was part of the endorsement, some \$6,000.

CA was awarded funding to develop this national, evidenced-based model to address infant mortality, African American infant mortality being the local and Ohio crisis. Since that time (2015) and as the result of OCHM funding, Pathways HUB Community Action has attained National Certification for Pathways Community HUBs, executed four Medicaid Managed Care Contracts for reimbursement for CHWs’ services rendered, trained over 45 CHWs and established a robust referral network to find pregnant women in need of services. In Program Year 2019-2020, Community Action Pathways HUB enrolled 244 women (80% were at risk minority

women). The women enrolled in Hub in 2019-2020, exceeded the number of recommended prenatal visits demonstrating regular prenatal care, and one-quarter of the women were enrolled in the 1st trimester of pregnancy and 43% were enrolled in the second trimester of pregnancy.

In 2020, based on preliminary program data, our HUB Low Birth Weight rate for singleton births to African-American mothers was 7.9 %. The Summit County LBW Rate for African American's was 15.3% in 2020. The HUB Pre-Term rate for singleton births to African-American mothers working with the Hub was 5.2 % compared to the County rate of 15.4 %.

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.

In 2020, Community Health Workers (CHWs) quickly adapted their services to accommodate all of the changes that resulted from the pandemic. CHWs continued to engage and support families remotely through telehealth efforts, connecting them to the most needed resources and ensuring that these services were obtain. In 2020, 13% of the education provided to families was specific to COVID-19 and 30% of the social service referrals were for food, housing and financial assistance. During this time, 70% (73 of 104) completed the necessary postpartum appointment and 40% (13 of 32) women obtained a medical home despite the challenges to accessing care during this pandemic. CHWs and the Pathways Hubs in Ohio continued to identify community resources, connect families to these services and have not stopped working to engage families. In addition, CHWs have become vital connectors to families for information about COVID and vaccines.

The Pathways HUB model and network of contracted partners that include 2 health systems (Summa Health, Akron Children's Hospital), 1 Federally Qualified Health Center (AxessPointe Community Health Centers), and 2 mental health organizations (Minority Behavioral Health Group and Child Guidance & Family Solutions) demonstrated the tenacity of the CHWs and significance of their work to support families in very critical situations like a pandemic. One innovation of the model is that client's risk is tracked over time, measuring individual and system barriers. HUBs are not only able to track risk at the individual and community level but are also able to track short term and long-term outcomes. The pathways profile of each family is directly correlated to a family's social and health outcomes. Payments from Medicaid payers are tied to outcomes achieved, ensuring model fidelity because outcomes are standardized. Dollars invested in this model create alignment around specific, successful outcomes. This data became invaluable during 2020 because the HUBs were able to track community needs and educational efforts of the CHWs.

Ohio Commission on Minority project 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.

Community Action supports the increased funding request of the Ohio Commission on Minority Health for Pathways Community HUBs in Ohio. This additional funding would allow HUBs to increase its capacity to serve additional high-risk pregnant women in additional counties where Hubs are certified to serve. Community Action receives funding to serve Summit County and has a service area of 3 surrounding counties. Currently, the Ohio Commission on Minority Health funds 17 of the 55 counties in the certified Hub regions.

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 which had led to the formal creation of the Ohio Certified Network of 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 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 Ohio Commission of Minority Health as leading voice in work to defeat infant mortality in Ohio.

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