



FIGHTING for PENNSYLVANIA FAMILIES

## **The Building a Sustainable Workforce for Healthy Communities Act S.3479**

*U.S. Senators Bob Casey, Thom Tillis, Tina Smith, and Lisa Murkowski*

### **Community Health Workers: A Workforce to Reduce Health Disparities**

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted existing health disparities in communities across the country.<sup>i</sup> Community health workers (CHWs) bridge gaps in health outcomes by providing health and social support within their own communities, connecting those in need with health care providers and other services such as housing, nutrition and employment assistance. Recruited from their communities, CHWs are best positioned to recognize local needs and reduce health disparities among the underserved. In the areas they serve, CHWs make an impact as informed, creative and empathetic problem solvers.

### **The Building a Sustainable Workforce for Healthy Communities Act of 2021**

The Building a Sustainable Workforce for Healthy Communities Act of 2021 strengthens the community health workforce by reauthorizing a competitive grant program for eligible entities (including state and local governments, Indian tribes or tribal organizations, urban Indian organizations, or community-based organizations) to develop or expand CHW programs. Funds would be used to recruit and train CHWs who reflect the needs of the community and support outreach to underserved communities and those requiring additional assistance during a public health emergency. CHWs would promote positive health behaviors and improve access to services supporting physical and mental health, such as childcare, housing, education, nutrition and employment.

### **Community health workers have a strong return on investment**

According to an estimate in *The Lancet Public Health*, more than a quarter of health care spending is associated with preventable diseases.<sup>ii</sup> Studies show CHWs can address the social causes of preventable disease – reducing health care spending significantly. A randomized controlled trial found that one program with evidence-based management practices yielded a return of \$2.47 for every dollar invested and that CHWs could save Medicaid \$4,200 per beneficiary each year.<sup>iii</sup> Other studies have demonstrated that CHWs can improve chronic disease control and mental health<sup>iv</sup>, promote healthy behavior<sup>v</sup> and reduce hospitalization.<sup>vi</sup> In addition, an evaluation of innovative care delivery models funded through the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Innovation revealed that, among models studied, only those including CHWs lowered cost.<sup>vii</sup>

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- <sup>i</sup> “Risk for COVID-19 Infection, Hospitalization, and Death By Race/Ethnicity,” last accessed January 11, 2022, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/investigations-discovery/hospitalization-death-by-race-ethnicity.html>.
- <sup>ii</sup> Howard J. Bolnick, et al. “Health-care spending attributable to modifiable risk factors in the USA: an economic attribution analysis,” *The Lancet Public Health* 5, no. 10 (October 2020), [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667\(20\)30203-6/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667(20)30203-6/fulltext).
- <sup>iii</sup> Shreya Kangovi, et al. “Evidence-Based Community Health Worker Program Addresses Unmet Social Needs And Generates Positive Return On Investment: A return on investment analysis of a randomized controlled trial of a standardized community health worker program that addresses unmet social needs for disadvantaged individuals,” *Health Affairs* 39, no. 2 (February 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.2019.00981>.
- <sup>iv</sup> Shreya Kangovi, et al. “Community Health Worker Support for Disadvantaged Patients With Multiple Chronic Diseases: A Randomized Clinical Trial,” *American Journal of Public Health (AJPH)* 107, no. 10 (June 2017), <https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/ref/10.2105/AJPH.2017.303985>.
- <sup>v</sup> Shreya Kangovi, et al. “Patient-Centered Community Health Worker Intervention to Improve Posthospital Outcomes: A Randomized Clinical Trial,” *JAMA Intern Med.* 174, no. 4 (April 2014), <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamainternalmedicine/fullarticle/1828743>.
- <sup>vi</sup> Aditi Vasani and John W. Morgan, et al. “Effects of a standardized community health worker intervention on hospitalization among disadvantaged patients with multiple chronic conditions: A pooled analysis of three clinical trials,” *Health Services Research* 55, S2 (July 2020), <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1475-6773.13321>.
- Shreya Kangovi et al. “Effect of Community Health Worker Support on Clinical Outcomes of Low-Income Patients Across Primary Care Facilities: A Randomized Clinical Trial,” *JAMA Internal Med.* 178, no. 12 (December 2018), <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamainternalmedicine/article-abstract/2707949>.
- <sup>vii</sup> *Health Care Innovation Awards (HCIA) Meta-Analysis and Evaluators Collaborative Annual Report Year 3* (RTI International, February 2018), <https://downloads.cms.gov/files/cmmti/hcia-metaanalysisthirdannualrpt.pdf>.

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