

Expand and Strengthen Rural Community Health Worker Workforce

Overview

This initiative increases access to care in South Dakota's rural and frontier areas by expanding and supporting Community Health Workers (CHWs) and Community Health Representatives (CHRs). These trusted local professionals bridge the gap between healthcare systems and the communities they serve. They help individuals manage chronic conditions, access preventive care, and connect to social supports. Funding will provide direct training support for new CHWs/CHRs and a competitive RFP process for a consultant to oversee technical assistance and sustainable program development to strengthen the CHW/CHR workforce statewide and develop sustainable reimbursement pathways through Medicaid.

Key Activities

- **Financial Sustainability & Payment Frameworks:** Support long-term financial sustainability by assisting organizations with Medicaid claims and billing processes, establishing Medicare billing pathways for CHWs/CHRs, and supporting the integration of CHWs into organizational structures to ensure durable funding and reimbursement.
- **Technical Assistance for Program Development & Expansion:** Assist organizations in establishing and expanding CHW programs.
- **Workforce Recruitment & Retention:** Develop strategies to recruit CHWs in rural communities, create career pathways and advancement opportunities, and maintain peer learning networks and communities of practice to support retention.
- **Training, Certification, & Professional Development:** Offer cross-training and educational opportunities for EMS professionals, medical assistants, patient access staff, tribal health workers, and other personnel.

Partners & Stakeholders

CHW and CHR Programs, SD Department of Health, SD Department of Social Services/SD Medicaid, Community Health Worker Collaborative of South Dakota, Lake Area Technical College, Southeast Technical College.

Amount Requested

- \$3,500,000 over five years

Expected Outcomes

- Increase the number of individuals trained as CHWs in South Dakota by 45% from 340 individuals to 500 individuals.
- Increase the number of Certified CHWs and CHRs by 60% from 180 certified to 300 certified.
- Increase the number of Medicaid recipients receiving CHW/CHR services by 40% from 1,250 recipients to 1,750 recipients. Initial analysis in SD indicates recipients utilizing CHW services had lower utilization of ambulance services and fewer hospitalizations than a comparable Medicaid population.

Why This Matters

The initiative positions CHWs and CHRs as a cornerstone of South Dakota's rural health system, improving care coordination, chronic disease prevention, and overall community health outcomes well beyond the grant period. This investment will expand and professionalize South Dakota's CHW/CHR workforce to strengthen access to care in rural and frontier areas.