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BLOG / 01-12-24

Trends in State Policies That Support the Community Health Worker Workforce

by [Megan D'Alessandro \(https://nashp.org/author/mdalessandro/\)](https://nashp.org/author/mdalessandro/), Elinor Higgins, [Sandra Wilkniss \(https://nashp.org/author/sandra-wilkniss/\)](https://nashp.org/author/sandra-wilkniss/)

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States continue to have a strong interest in sustaining, developing, and partnering with the [community health worker \(https://www.apha.org/apha-communities/member-sections/community-health-workers\)](https://www.apha.org/apha-communities/member-sections/community-health-workers) (CHW) workforce. During the COVID-19 pandemic, an influx of [federal funding \(https://www.cdc.gov/covid-community-health-workers/ccr-recipient-profiles.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/covid-community-health-workers/ccr-recipient-profiles.html)

[CDC AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fccr-recipients.html](https://www.cdc.gov/covid-community-health-workers/ccr-recipients.html)) supported CHW services and infrastructure. With that grant funding coming to an end, states are seeking sustainable financing approaches to maintain and grow access to CHW services and supports.

NASHP's [updated 50-state tracker \(https://nashp.org/state-tracker/state-community-health-worker-policies/\)](https://nashp.org/state-tracker/state-community-health-worker-policies/) provides a lens into state strategies across the country to achieve those goals. State policymakers are more intentionally partnering with CHW partners and allies [to develop strategies to sustain the workforce. \(https://nashp.org/lessons-for-advancing-and-sustaining-state-community-health-worker-partnerships/\)](https://nashp.org/lessons-for-advancing-and-sustaining-state-community-health-worker-partnerships/) A growing number of states are using [Medicaid levers \(https://nashp.org/state-approaches-to-community-health-worker-financing-through-medicaid-state-plan-amendments/\)](https://nashp.org/state-approaches-to-community-health-worker-financing-through-medicaid-state-plan-amendments/) to pay for CHW services, aligning Medicaid approaches with other funding mechanisms, and advancing professional development standards, training, and certification to pay for CHW services.

NASHP's research for the 2023 [updated tracker \(https://nashp.org/state-tracker/state-community-health-worker-policies/\)](https://nashp.org/state-tracker/state-community-health-worker-policies/), along with ongoing state engagement through a state learning collaborative and individual state [technical assistance \(https://nashp.org/six-states-selected-for-nashps-community-health-worker-chw-state-policy-development-technical-assistance-opportunity/\)](https://nashp.org/six-states-selected-for-nashps-community-health-worker-chw-state-policy-development-technical-assistance-opportunity/), informed key trends and topics related to Medicaid reimbursement, training and certification, and definition of the workforce. The update includes state activity in the following categories:

- State CHW Definitions
- Certification and Training
- Medicaid Reimbursement
- Other Funding or Financing Mechanisms
- Key Partnerships
- State CHW Legislation

Medicaid Approaches

As states work toward sustainable financing for the CHW workforce — which represents and assists people from low-income and underserved communities — leveraging Medicaid strategies is key. Increasingly, states have opted to make CHW services reimbursable under state plans. When NASHP last updated [the 50-state tracker \(https://nashp.org/state-tracker/state-community-health-worker-policies/\)](https://nashp.org/state-tracker/state-community-health-worker-policies/) in 2021, six states had state plan amendments (SPAs) in place authorizing Medicaid reimbursement for CHW services. As of December 2023, 15 states have approved SPAs, with several others indicating that a SPA is in development or that there is a legislative mandate to introduce one in the future.

Learn More about SPAs

Read [NASHP's blog post \(https://nashp.org/state-approaches-to-community-health-worker-financing-through-medicaid-state-plan-amendments/\)](https://nashp.org/state-approaches-to-community-health-worker-financing-through-medicaid-state-plan-amendments/) for more information about CHW Medicaid financing through state plan amendments.

States also use other Medicaid strategies and levers to support CHW services in an effort to reach target populations and improve health. A handful of states have active 1115 demonstration waivers that support CHW activities for specific populations or fund managed care organizations (MCOs) to pilot CHW interventions. A few states encourage, allow, or require MCOs to offer CHW services by hiring CHWs or contracting with CHW employers (often community-based organizations). Several states also reported that MCOs in the state may be using administrative funds to pay for CHW services that support case management. For examples of state Medicaid approaches, see [NASHP's 50-state tracker \(https://nashp.org/state-tracker/state-community-health-worker-policies/\)](https://nashp.org/state-tracker/state-community-health-worker-policies/)

Certification

[While not every state has chosen to pursue certification \(https://www.astho.org/communications/blog/why-louisiana-doesnt-certify-community-health-workers/\)](https://www.astho.org/communications/blog/why-louisiana-doesnt-certify-community-health-workers/), around half of states have opted to define standard qualifications for [CHW services through certification \(https://www.astho.org/topic/brief/state-](https://www.astho.org/topic/brief/state-chw-services-through-certification)

[approaches-to-community-health-worker-certification/](#)) programs that are either implemented by the state or another entity, such as a state CHW association or third-party certification board.

One emerging theme is a growing interest in certification programs led by state CHW associations, which are uniquely situated to understand workforce needs and key qualifications. For example, the [South Carolina CHW Credentialing Council](https://scchwa.org/credentialing-info/) (SCCHWCC), approves educational programs and administers South Carolina's certification program and core competency training for CHWs. SCCHWCC is led by the South Carolina CHW Association and includes representation from state health officials.

CHW certification, or in some cases a state-recognized training curricula, remains a central approach to defining CHW qualifications for Medicaid reimbursement — and soon, Medicare reimbursement as well. The [2024 Medicare Physician Fee Schedule](https://www.cms.gov/newsroom/press-releases/cms-finalizes-physician-payment-rule-advances-health-equity) (https://www.cms.gov/newsroom/press-releases/cms-finalizes-physician-payment-rule-advances-health-equity) added a CHW benefit for Medicare beneficiaries. Because there is no national CHW certification program, eligibility for Medicare reimbursement will rely in part on state-recognized CHW qualifications. In states that do not have CHW certification or standardized training, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) plans to rely on training that aligns with [CHW Core Consensus Project](https://www.c3project.org/) (C3 Project) standards (https://www.c3project.org/).

Definitions

At the state and [federal level](https://www.bls.gov/ooh/community-and-social-service/community-health-workers.htm?) (https://www.bls.gov/ooh/community-and-social-service/community-health-workers.htm?

[utm_campaign=Updated+Profile+for+Community+Health+Workers&utm_medium=email&utm_source=GovDelivery#tab-2](https://www.bls.gov/ooh/community-and-social-service/community-health-workers.htm?utm_campaign=Updated+Profile+for+Community+Health+Workers&utm_medium=email&utm_source=GovDelivery#tab-2)), there is increasing interest in ensuring that the CHW workforce is defined accurately and consistently to support hiring practices and program design that match the lived experiences and skills of CHWs. Many states that have a CHW definition use or adapt the [American Public Health Association \(APHA\) definition](https://www.apha.org/apha-communities/member-sections/community-health-workers) (https://www.apha.org/apha-communities/member-sections/community-health-workers), which was developed with input from CHWs across the nation.

APHA Definition of Community Health Worker

CHW definitions serve both educational and regulatory purposes and are a key first step in supporting broader understanding about how CHWs fit into the health care and public health landscape. See NASHP's updated 50-state tracker (<https://nashp.org/state-tracker/state-community-health-worker-policies/>) for a nationwide look at how states have defined the CHW workforce.

NASHP provides a variety of services and programs to support state health workers and improve the quality of CHW services. These include:

- **Technical assistance** (education, training, and certification) to build individual and organizational capacity.
- **Community health worker-led quality improvement** projects to address health disparities and improve care.
- **Policy development** to support state health workers and improve the CHW workforce.

 NASHP is also a part of a range of activities such as [technical assistance \(education for six states us lead for nashp community health worker-chw-state-policy-development-technical-assistance-opportunity/\)](https://nashp.org/education/education-for-six-states-us-lead-for-nashp-community-health-worker-chw-state-policy-development-technical-assistance-opportunity/) and a learning collaborative for state officials that convenes every other month. Email [Megan D'Alessandro \(mailto:mdalessandro@nashp.org\)](mailto:mdalessandro@nashp.org) or [Elinor Higgins \(mailto:ehiggins@nashp.org\)](mailto:ehiggins@nashp.org) if you are interested in learning more about these efforts.

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State Community Health Worker Policies (<https://nashp.org/state-tracker/state-community-health-worker-policies/>)

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