

Return on Investment

Community Health Workers

Understand who they are, how they work,
and why they are an essential part of public health



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NACHW
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS

“The community that is closest
to the problem is closest
to the solution.”

**Denise Octavia Smith,
CHW, PN, MBA**

Inaugural Executive Director,
NACHW (2019-2025)

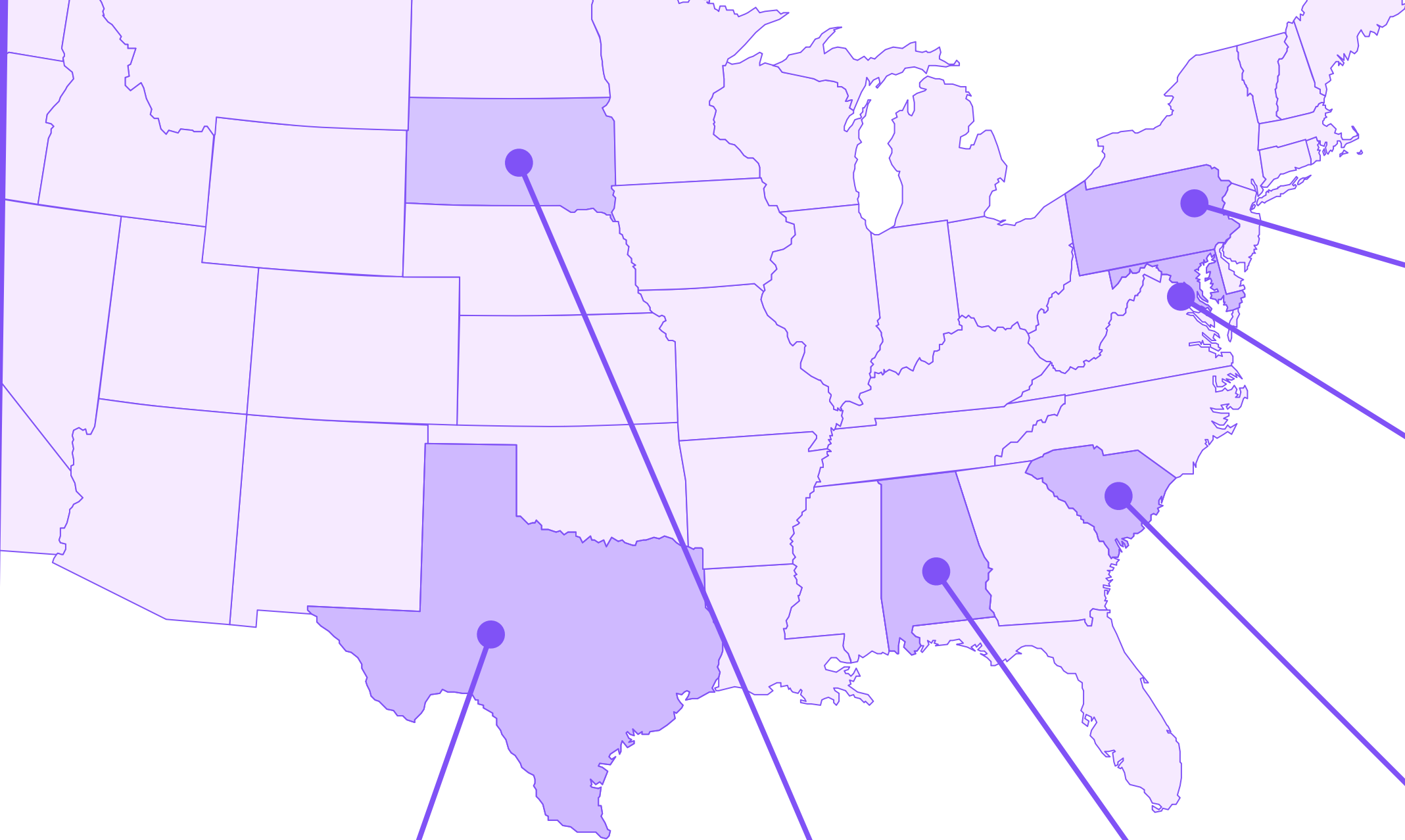


CHWs save lives, time, and money



- ◆ Proven effectiveness in reducing health inequities, containing costs, and improving outcomes across a wide range of diseases and conditions.
- ◆ A CHW intervention program resulted in average savings of \$2,245 per patient and a total savings of \$262,080 for 117 patients, along with improved quality of life.
- ◆ Every dollar invested in a CHW intervention that addresses unmet social needs for disadvantaged people was found to return \$2.47 to an average Medicaid payer within the fiscal year.
- ◆ In a Maryland study, patients receiving services from both a CHW and a nurse case manager had the greatest declines in A1C (glycosylated hemoglobin) values, cholesterol triglycerides, and diastolic blood pressure.
- ◆ A 2022 study of CHWs in South Carolina, confirmed a savings of \$9.72 for every \$1 invested in CHW's services. In short, both patients and health systems benefit when CHWs are integrated into care.
- ◆ Connecting CHWs to primary care providers across 11 states to increase the number of patients receiving early treatment and diagnosis for chronic kidney disease. (National Kidney Foundation CKD Intercept program)
- ◆ Training and placing nutrition-focused CHWs within health clinics to provide patients with high quality food in alignment with their disease management. (S. Topping, personal interview, Feb 28, 2025)
- ◆ CHWs were indispensable in ensuring widespread vaccination during the COVID-19 pandemic; their role was recognized and funded by the CDC. For example, the New York Department of Health partnered with CHWs to provide vaccine information to community residents during the COVID-19 pandemic and increased community vaccine uptake from 44% to 76% in 1 year.
- ◆ CHWs are shown to have a marked positive impact on pediatric asthma, including understanding of how to use the medication; plus they lower hospital readmission rates for people with chronic respiratory diseases.

This list is not exhaustive but illustrates some of the millions of communities in which CHWs have proven to help people live healthier lives.



Pennsylvania
A randomized controlled trial found that a CHW program yielded a return of \$2.47 for every \$1 invested, saving \$4,200 per Medicaid beneficiary per year

South Carolina
A 2022 study found evidence of \$9.72 saved for every \$1 invested in CHWs

Maryland
An analysis of Medicaid claims showed that a diabetes-focused CHW program resulted in 40% fewer ER visits and an average savings of \$2,245 per patient per year

South Dakota
CHW services were associated with an average of 3 fewer days of treatment interruptions for people with cancer

Alabama
CHWs helped improve and deliver a clinical intervention for people with diabetes and chronic pain, resulting in high patient completion and satisfaction rates

Texas
A CHW-delivered intervention improved asthma knowledge and self-management among school-aged children

Healthy Lives, *For Everyone*

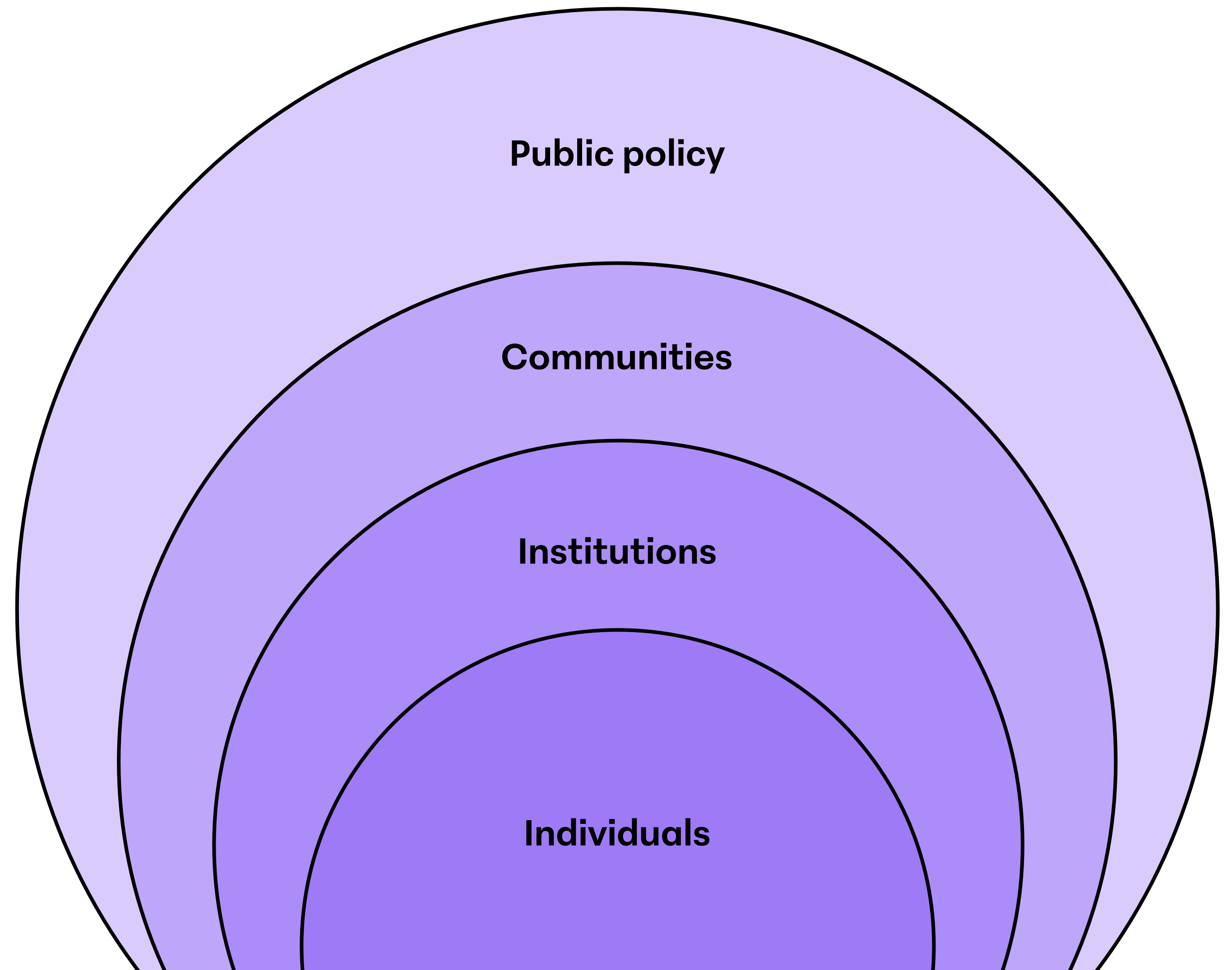
CHWs help all of us

Individuals: Reduce barriers to care; Increase access to support for all social determinants of health.

Institutions: Reduce cost of care due to prevention; Increase capacity to serve community needs.

Communities: Reduce illness and distrust of healthcare providers; Increase thriving by expanding access to quality care and social services.

Public policy: Reduce deaths and cost of service; Increase resilience to crises and effectiveness of public health.



Community Health Workers: Public Health Leaders Among Us



CHWs are frontline public health workers expert in addressing the social determinants of health, who are trusted members of the community they serve.

This trusting relationship enables the worker to serve as **a link between health and social services and the community** to facilitate access to services and improve the quality and cultural competence of service delivery. CHWs are trained to build health equity by responding to racial inequities and preventing violence within historically oppressed populations. A CHW also **builds individual and community capacity by increasing health knowledge and self-sufficiency** through a range of activities such as outreach, health literacy education, navigation of social and health services, and community advocacy.

[NACHW, American Public Health Association,](#)
[American Public Health Association](#)



The 6 Pillars of Community Health Workers

1 Unique

CHWs are an under-appreciated yet crucial workforce that address social determinants of health and play practical roles in communities that help to achieve health equity and wellbeing for all.

2 Community-based

CHWs' work is grounded in community advocacy, capacity building, and relationships. CHWs' commitment to communities where they live and serve is largely due to shared life experience.

3 Historic and diverse

For many CHWs, their strengths lie in their diverse languages, cultures, faiths, races, and genders, building upon centuries of their profession's experience as healers and advocates, community health representatives, promotores, aunties, outreach workers, peers, and more.

4 Cross-sector

CHWs work across different sectors to integrate people's needs—including food security, social work, cancer, HIV, substance use disorder, advocacy, support groups, education, mental health, housing, workforce development, immigration, and voting rights.

5 Proven

Sixty years worth of study and research have shown just how important community health workers are to clinical, public health, and social systems.



6 Precarious

As a majority-female workforce, CHWs are among the lowest paid among other public health professionals, dependent upon short-term grants instead of sustainable reimbursement models. National and state policies, health systems, and providers are inconsistent in their recognition and integration of CHWs' professional roles.

Core roles played by CHWs

This list is not exhaustive but illustrates the breadth of ways in which CHWs have proven to be essential to helping communities live healthier lives.

Direct service provider

Culturally inclusive health education and information

Care coordination, case management, and system navigation

Advocacy for individuals and communities



Cultural mediation among individuals, communities, and health and social service systems

Coaching and social support

Evaluation and research participation

Outreach conduct

Individual and community capacity building

Individual and community assessments implementation

CHWs Strengthen Communities – saving lives, time, and money



“Chronic disease is more prevalent in people with less access to nutritious foods and health care, including many older adults. CHWs are playing a key role in improving quality of life for those living with obesity, diabetes and other chronic diseases.”

[The Role of Community Health Workers in Fighting Obesity and Chronic Disease, National Council on Aging](#)



“CHWs play a crucial role in combating the health impact of vector-borne illnesses, novel pathogens, natural disasters, and extreme heat.”

[From Unpaid to Unstoppable: The Rise of the Professional Community Health Worker Movement](#)

Get in Touch

Are you working with CHWs or exploring the value of CHWs in your work?

Are you a CHW who can share an example of sustainable funding models that others can learn from?

We'd love to hear from you.

info@atlasclarity.com



Thanks

This report was created with the generous collaboration and participation of numerous experts and partners:

Atlas Clarity

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National Association of Community Health Workers / Health Resources in Action

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Including interviews with:

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Floribella Redondo-Martinez, Co-Founder & CEO, Arizona Community Health Workers Association

Leticia Boughton Price, Co-Executive Director, Illinois Community Health Workers Association

Allison Goldberg, President, Merck Foundation; Executive Director of Global Impact Giving, Merck, Merck & Co.

Ben Money, Senior Vice President, Public Health Priorities, National Association of Community Health Centers

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