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Department of Health  
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## 2014 LEGISLATIVE FACT SHEET

**TITLE:** Training and Certification of Community Health Workers (CHW) in New Mexico

**SHORT SUMMARY:** The proposed legislation would support the Department of Health (DOH) in state statute to implement a statewide, standardized competency-based training program and a voluntary professional certification process/program for CHWs in New Mexico with oversight by the DOH. Certified CHWs would be required to complete a background check in order to complete the certification process.

**WHO ARE COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS?**

- A Community Health Worker (CHW) is a frontline public health worker who is a trusted member of the community that has an unusually close understanding of the community served. This trusting relationship enables the CHW to act as a liaison or intermediary between health and social services and the community to facilitate access to services and improve the quality and cultural competence of service delivery.
- A CHW works to increase health knowledge and healthy behaviors. CHW activities include: outreach, community education, informal counseling, social support, referral and advocacy.
- CHW is a broad category that is made up of individuals with many different titles, including promotores (as); tribal community health representatives (CHR); patient and community health navigators; community outreach and support workers; case managers; outreach workers; community support workers; and, client or patient advocates.
- CHWs play a critical role in: reducing health disparities, increasing access to care, and coordinating comprehensive care.
- CHWs extend the reach and quality of and reduce the cost for health care.
- There is estimated to be approximately 800-900 individuals who have received training as CHWs (including Tribal CHRs) in NM.
- Although CHWs have been serving New Mexico communities and families for decades, there exists no certification process in the state to ensure basic skills and knowledge.

**BENEFITS OF THE BILL:** The benefits for a CHW competency-based training and certification program in New Mexico include:

- Community college level training provides academic credit and promotes career advancement opportunities through formal education.
- Standardized competency-based training promotes a common knowledge base and skill set among a diversity of CHWs.
- Community based training allows CHWs to be trained in the communities in which they live and serve.
- On-the-job training improves capabilities and enhances standards of practice.
- Certification legitimizes the work of CHWs and provides potential

reimbursement opportunities for service.

- Secures long-term funding sources for CHW programs, such as 3rd-party payer reimbursement sources for certified CHWs.
- Develops a common knowledge base among a diverse community of CHWs.
- Certification increases the recognition and value of CHWs among other healthcare professionals.

**WHAT SUPPORT EXISTS FOR THIS PROPOSED BILL?**

There is broad support for CHW certification by a statewide CHW Advisory Council, which includes representation from CHW associations and committees, universities and community colleges, health care providers, managed care organizations, CHW trainers, and most community health workers groups. Other considerations include:

- New Mexico ranks at the bottom or near the bottom of many national health statistics and is experiencing a continued and critical shortage of health care providers, particularly in rural and inner-city areas. More than one-third of NM residents live in a frontier area.
- CHWs often work in rural areas where the medical model of health care is limited or non-existent.
- CHWs in New Mexico are effective health educators, service providers, and interpreters. They are often involved in community organizing and the development of health and social service projects and are an important, direct link in accessing health care.
- CHWs serve as an extension of professional health care providers and bridge cultural differences by offering culturally and linguistically appropriate care to underserved communities.
- Research demonstrates the work of CHWs reduce healthcare costs, increase access to care, and improve health status.
- The Health and Human Services (HHS) Action Plan to Reduce Racial and Ethnic Disparities and federal healthcare reform call for the use of CHWs.
- Centennial Care identifies provider classification codes for CHWs.

**RETURN ON INVESTMENT:**

The financial benefits generated by CHWs offset the investment. For example:

- A recent University of New Mexico (UNM) study compared the impact of a CHW intervention on relatively high consumers of health resources in a Medicaid managed care system. For those consumers who received intervention from a CHW worker, there was a total cost savings of \$2,044,465.00 compared to other high consumers who had not received CHW intervention (Johnson, *et al.* 2012. Community Health Workers & Medicaid Managed Care in New Mexico. *Journal of Community Health* 37:563-571)
- Another U.S. study found that investing \$41,184 per year in community health workers for a period of ten years generates net economic benefits of \$481,920. For this study, there was a 2.3 : 1.0 benefit-to-cost ratio.
- An Arkansas agency used specifically trained community health workers to identify people with unmet long-term care needs in three disadvantaged counties and connect them to Medicaid home and community based services. The result was a 23.8 percent average reduction in annual Medicaid spending per participant during the period 2005-08.