



The Ohio Department of Health (ODH) has been awarded funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to fund a statewide, comprehensive initiative to engage Community Health Workers (CHWs) around the state to provide coordinated connection to COVID-19 education, care and social services. The project will also expand CHW's participation in the overall public health response through case investigation, COVID-19 related education and information sharing, especially in regard to eliminating barriers to accessing the COVID-19 vaccine. The CDC initiative, titled "Community Health Workers for COVID Response and Resilient Communities (CCR)" will provide funding to ten regionally focused Pathways Community HUBs (PCHs) across the state. Each PCH is a member of the Ohio Network of Certified Community Pathways HUBs and provide service to 66 of Ohio's 88 counties, accounting for over 7 million residents.

PCHs are subcontracted with 70 community-based organizations called Care Coordination Agencies (CCAs) within their respective regions. **ODH has partnered with the Healthcare Collaborative of Greater Columbus (HCGC), a regional healthcare improvement collaborative that manages the highest performing PCH nationally and statewide, the Central Ohio Pathways HUB (COPHUB), to manage the project.** There are currently 205 CHWs employed by the various PCHs across the state who will expand COVID-19 care resource coordination through the CCR initiative.

What is a CHW?

A CHW is a person, also known as a care coordinator, who is from the community that they serve. Employed by community-based organizations, they are experts at connecting their clients to quality care and services to address the risks each unique, individual situation presents. In addressing the social drivers of health, in addition to the medical drivers of health, CHWs place their clients on "pathways" to direct medical access, language translation services, transportation, as unemployment & utility assistance, health insurance coverage, housing and rental assistance, and thousands of other care and service connections. The beauty of the Pathways Community HUB model, which was created by the Pathways Community HUB Institute (PCHI), is that it is plug and play: ready to implement when and where individuals indicate the need.

Expanding CHW Capacity & Reach through CCR

Ohio has developed a rich CHW infrastructure via state certification from the Ohio Board of Nursing and the implementation of the Pathways Community HUB model, allowing for coordinated, community-based care for individuals with complex health and social needs and has demonstrated cost-savings and improved health outcomes. Inequity and disparities that were already rampant for the states' at-risk populations were amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the ODH COVID-19 Dashboard, people of non-White race in Ohio represent 17% of the state's population, but account for 40% of COVID-19 cases and 30% of COVID-19-related

hospitalizations. Nationally, non-Hispanic Black or African American people are nearly two times as likely to die from COVID-19 when compared to people who are non-Hispanic White. The CDC also recognizes that other priority populations at higher risk for COVID-19 infection and death include older adults, people with medical conditions, pregnant women, and individuals with substance use disorders, disabilities, and/or dementia. CCR funding will support PCHs that are already contracted with Ohio's Medicaid Managed Care Plans (MCPs) for outcome-based payments via a state mandate to serve as care coordinators for marginalized, at-risk populations.

At the onset of the pandemic, CHWs working for COPHUB engaged their clients in COVID-19 education by the thousands, assisting central Ohio clients in understanding the ever-changing, complex, and sometimes confusing navigation of a novel virus and an increasingly devastating social situation. Other regional PCHs in the state also provided varying levels of COVID care resource coordination, though despite having this infrastructure throughout the pandemic, the COPHUB is the only PCH in the state that expanded capacity to utilize CHWs for more specific COVID-19 needs such as case investigation and care resource coordination in partnership with local health departments. Through this grant, ODH will work with HCGC to refine their engagement strategies and evidence-based practices, developed with central Ohio local health departments, Nationwide Children's Hospital (NCH) and Partners In Health (PIH), a global healthy equity non-profit with experience in pandemic and epidemic response. Partners on the grant will work to scale HCGC's engagement strategies across the service regions for Ohio's other PCHs.

Statewide CHW trainings will encompass instruction from Nationwide Children's Hospital on how to effectively engage community members to encourage participation in public health efforts to curb the uptick in COVID-19 cases. PIH will provide in depth trainings on the epidemiological and social implications of the pandemic, giving CHWs in depth knowledge to make them thought leaders and trusted messengers in their communities. Finally, the Ohio State University College of Public Health will expand their COVID-19 mitigation mapping tool that was successfully piloted in Franklin County at the height of the pandemic to each PCH service area. The mapping tool will use COVID-19 case rate and vaccine uptake data to inform public health strategy and CHW deployment to the neighborhoods that are most at risk for further negative impact of the pandemic. Evaluation partners on the grant are Center for Health Outcomes and Policy Evaluation Studies at the Ohio State University College of Public Health, as well as Strategic Research Group.

This statewide approach is the first of its kind in capitalizing on the efforts of CHWs who are boots-on-the-ground, community members who are trusted experts to help their neighbors navigate a once in a lifetime public health crisis. ODH and HCGC envision best practices that will be developed and honed for public health efforts related to the current pandemic, and of those in the future, as well.

About HCGC and The Central Ohio Pathways HUB

As one of over 30 Regional Health Improvement Collaboratives (RHICs) across the country, the Healthcare Collaborative of Greater Columbus is a neutral, safe space collective impact 501c3 nonprofit that brings together providers, hospitals, social service agencies, public and private insurance, employers, government, public health, patients, and consumers to improve the equity, access, and quality of healthcare and the overall health for all people in the Columbus region. HCGC provides data, facilitation, quality improvement coaching and technical assistance to its partners in Central Ohio. HCGC's Central Ohio Pathways HUB has been in operation since January of 2019, began serving clients in March 2019 and became nationally certified in November 2019. HUB CHWs are employed by 12 agencies in Central Ohio, each sub-contracted with the HUB, to operate a

standardized risk mitigation/care coordination model. HUB agencies include Franklin County Public Health, Union County Public Health, Ross County Health District, The Columbus Urban League, The Breathing Association, Wellness First, LLC, Physicians CareConnection, PrimaryOne Health, Heart of Ohio Family Health Centers, Ethiopian Tewahedo Social Services-ETSS, Destined Pathways and Urban Strategies. The HUB enables these agencies and their CHWs to reduce variation and duplication of services and be reimbursed for outcomes by completing “pathways.” Pathways address all aspects of health, social services (including food, transportation and housing needs) as well as adult/career education, insurance and employment attainment. For more information, visit: www.hcqc.org.

About the Ohio Network of Certified Pathways Community HUBs

Ohio’s ten Pathways Community HUBs (PCHs) joined to form the Ohio Network of Certified Pathways Community HUBs (ONCPCH) in 2020. The Vision of the ONCPCH is that Ohio’s health, behavioral, and social policies and funding acknowledge and enhance the role of PCHs to achieve health equity for all people in Ohio. While each PCH is built of, for and by the community it serves, the Organization strives to: Educate the Organization’s members regarding policy changes, partnerships, areas of collaboration as a statewide group, or other opportunities where speaking with a collective PCH voice or spreading/scaling a collective PCH innovation will benefit all; Advocate on behalf the PCH Model with government and policy leaders; Provide PCH technical assistance and support to one another on areas of best practice and/or common ground; Foster collaborations among members in Ohio. Member PCHs include: Better Health Partnership, Cleveland; Bridges to Wellness HUB, Tuscarawas County; Central Ohio Pathways HUB, Central Ohio; Community Action Pathways HUB, Stark County; Community; Health Access Project, Mansfield; Health Care Access Now, Cincinnati; Mahoning Valley Pathways HUB, Youngstown; Northwest Ohio Pathways HUB, Toledo; Pathways HUB Community Action, Akron; Stark County THRIVE, Canton. These ten member PCHs have a total catchment area of 50 counties and over 7 billion Ohio residents.