

Alameda County Capacity Building Collaborative Invests in Better Workplaces for Community Health Workers/*Promotores*

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Over the past several years, the state’s awareness of the work of the community health workers, *promotores*, and representatives (CHW/P/Rs) workforce has increased dramatically. California has made several investments and policy changes that seek to support and amplify the role of CHW/P/Rs, including adding a new Medi-Cal CHW benefit. Community health workers, *promotores*, and representatives have a long history of connecting and listening to those not well served by the traditional health care system. However, although integrating their work into Medi-Cal brings opportunity, it also comes with challenges and barriers that must be addressed to ensure these new benefits reach their full potential.

“It is important for higher-level managers to understand the role and value of CHWs. Having care team partners with lived experience is key to health equity, and CHWs are critical not only to health equity goals, but also to goals related to upstream health care and cost containment.”

**—Nancy Halloran, Deputy Director,
Alameda County Care Connect, Alameda
County Health Care Services Agency**

Alameda County’s Community Health Worker (CHW) Capacity Building Collaborative has focused its efforts on:

- Helping organizations create better workplaces for CHW/Ps
- Creating more opportunities for people to become CHW/Ps
- Supporting CHW/Ps to advance their skills and careers.

The Alameda County CHW Capacity Building Collaborative (CBC) is made possible by the California Health Care Foundation in partnership with Health Leads. Together, they launched the [Community Health Worker/*Promotor*/Representative \(CHW/P/R\) Workforce Capacity Building Collaborative](#) in June 2022.

This project includes four regional groups working to advance health equity by developing and deploying financially sustainable CHW/P/R models that will affect the health of their communities. These regional groups include Alameda County; the Central Coast; Orange, Riverside, and San Bernardino Counties; and



San Diego County and include a variety of partners such as managed care plans, academic institutions, community-based organizations, and others.

Led by the Alameda County Health Care Services Agency, the Alameda County CHW/P CBC builds on important work the county started through its Whole Person Care program, where they saw firsthand the value of involving people with lived experience in health care and the culturally affirmative approach to care that CHWs can bring.

“With CHWs as partners, consumers are more likely to develop trusting relationships with their care teams, and become more engaged in their care — that helps us get to better health outcomes, both for the consumers and the system,” said Nancy Halloran, deputy director of Alameda County Care Connect at Alameda County Health Care Services Agency.

Alameda County has focused their efforts on two overarching goals:

1. Develop consensus-based policies and practices for work environments that provide the supports, resources, and hospitality to successfully recruit and retain CHW/Ps of color whose lived experience mirror those served.
2. Develop and pilot test a model CHW/P apprenticeship program

Alameda County project leaders have held interactive practice design sessions monthly with employers, program managers, and CHW/Ps to discuss and develop policies and practices for creating better CHW/P work environments. They emphasize that this participatory and inclusive process was important to achieve the highest quality results.

Session topics have included:

- Essential skills and challenges for supervision of CHWs
- What organizations need to manage boundaries with CHW roles
- Understanding development of new California Department of Health Care Access and Information guidelines for certification of CHWs and training programs
- Ethical and practical considerations for defining lived experience

And with the input of these sessions, Alameda County’s CHW Capacity Building Collaborative has drafted consensus-based competencies for CHWs that align with both community design and state

requirements, and a set of graduated job description templates that illustrate potential career paths for CHWs.

Alameda Health System, a key partner in the regional collaborative, has embarked on a parallel process of building its infrastructure to expand this workforce, engaging CHW/Ps in all aspects of their internal CHW/P development and expansion work. They are using the learning collaborative tools to help create standard job descriptions, onboarding, and supervision for this expansion.

In support of their second goal, [Berkeley City College](#), a key partner in the Alameda County CHW/P collaborative, has designed a free CHW/P Apprenticeship Program that will launch in June 2024. Through this program, students can earn a CHW certificate in one semester and will be guaranteed a placement with an employment partner.

Alameda County, through all its work, has remained committed to engaging deeply with regional CHW/Ps. In September, Alameda County's CBC held a daylong, in-person CHW/P convening. The convening was at full capacity, with over 20 local organizations represented, 100 attendees, and a waitlist. The convening engaged workers from across the county in networking, learning, and opportunities to provide feedback. CHW/Ps appreciated the chance to connect with each other and expressed interest in identifying ways to stay connected. The CHW/P project leaders noted the excitement from the CHW/Ps and the interest in building a movement.

The combination of mission-driven CHW/Ps and hospitable work environments can provide a tight linkage," said Edwards.

“Recruitment and retention are challenging with CHW/Ps. You often can’t do it with money alone,” said Valerie Edwards, LCSW, consultant to HCSA and director of the Peer to Peer Advisor program. “But we have started to recognize the importance of an organization having a hospitable environment for CHWs, a workplace that is welcoming and attentive to their needs, a workplace that recognizes and celebrates different cultural backgrounds, a workplace and supervisors that invest in supporting CHW/Ps in their work and helping them with the challenges they face in their daily work.”