

## Inland CHW/P Collaborative Focuses on Centering Community Health Workers/*Promotores*

November 2023

Over the past several years, the state's awareness of the contributions of the community health worker/*promotor*/representative (CHW/P/R) workforce has increased dramatically. California has made several investments and policy changes that seek to support and amplify the role of CH/P/Rs, including adding a new Medi-Cal CHW benefit. Community health workers, *promotores*, and representatives have a long history of connecting with and listening to those not well served by the traditional health care system, and integrating their work into Medi-Cal brings the opportunity to expand their reach. But it also presents challenges and barriers to care that need to be addressed.

**"Now that the state is focusing on CHW/Ps, it is critical to bring their voices to state policymakers. With the new state benefit, there is a risk of CHW/Ps losing their identity, of their role changing, of them just becoming case workers. We want to make sure that the unique value and role of CHW/Ps is recognized and encouraged."**

**— Alex Fajardo, Executive Director, El Sol Neighborhood Education Center**



A regional team from Orange, San Bernardino, and Riverside Counties is focusing on placing CHW/Ps front and center in order to advance the impact of the workforce in their region. The Inland CHW/P Collaborative 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 improve the health of their communities. The groups represent the Central Coast; Alameda County; Orange, Riverside, and

**“We want to make sure that community health workers and *promotores* are part of the conversations in which decisions are being made about them. We want to create space for them and elevate their voices.”**

— **Hilda Ortiz, Program Director for Promotor Learning Institute, Latino Health Access**

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

Led by the El Sol Neighborhood Education Center and Latino Health Access, the Inland CHW/P Community Building Collaborative (CBC) established a core team of six local partners; engaged 60 local organizations, including community-

based organizations, hospitals, clinics, and public health departments; and brought in more than 100 CHW/Ps to deepen the capacity of the workforce across their region.

The Inland CBC’s first step was to have conversations with both providers and CHW/Ps in the field to learn and hear their perspectives. Building positive relationships and rapport has been essential to establishing a collaborative process, and has enabled providers to see the value of the CHW/P workforce, both in terms of its financial benefit, and when it comes to helping to build trust and increase satisfaction among Medi-Cal recipients, non-English speakers, and other underserved populations.

The Inland CBC also conducted a baseline assessment of scope, supervision practices, and financing to gauge how CHW/Ps are being used by regional healthcare systems and community-based organizations. With that deep understanding in hand, the team created community health worker and provider subcommittees made up of mission-driven leaders from health plans, health centers, hospitals, and community-based organizations. Their shared goal is developing sustainable funding streams to integrate newly hired and existing CHW/Ps into their organizations.

The CHW subcommittee plans and leads all CHW/P events, including a series of informal Coffee Chat/Cafecito gatherings and a regional summer retreat. During the retreat last August, 70 CHW/Ps came together and discussed shared challenges, learned new strategies, and built novel support systems.



The Inland CBC has organized their work into three learning cycles:

- *Honoring the Work of CHW/Ps*. This cycle focuses on building community and connecting CHW/Ps with their peers and colleagues.
- *My Role in the Healthcare Delivery System*. This cycle focusing on discussion and furthering the understanding of the skills and knowledge each CHW/P brings to the healthcare system.

- *The Bigger Picture: Equity.* This cycle emphasizes the opportunity and role of CHW/Ps to advance health equity in our communities through career pathways and equitable pay.

During each learning cycle, the Inland CBC participates in a statewide seminar, hosts conversations with providers, and facilitates gatherings. Bringing the voices and first-hand experiences of CHW/Ps to the forefront of conversations with providers has been a priority.

Looking forward, Inland CBC leaders recognize the ongoing complexity of advancing the CHW/P workforce in their region. They continue to pursue capacity-building for health care systems to integrate CHW/Ps, provide education and training for CHW/Ps on how to work with and within health care systems, and determine the best financing models for reliable reimbursement and fair compensation.

**“Baby steps are important. We started off super ambitious, but we quickly realized that there was a lot of confusion among organizations in our region about the role of CHW/Ps. We needed to figure out how best to engage with these organizations and work with them to recognize and incorporate the valuable work of CHW/Ps.”**

— **Odilia Garcia, CHW/Ps Training Center Director, El Sol Neighborhood Education Center**

### **The Inland CBC’s Three Overarching Goals**

1. Support the integration and deepen the capacity of the CHW/P workforce within health systems and community-based organizations to advance health equity sustainably meet growing demand in light of Medi-Cal expansion and CalAIM.
2. Clearly define the role of the CHW/P within health care organizations and recognize the unique skills CHW/Ps bring to increase access and improve community member experiences.
3. Highlight the importance of maintaining CHW/P identity as the profession continues to grow.