

## Listening Is Key to Central Coast Community Health Worker/Promotor/Representative Collaborative

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California's recent addition of community health worker services as a Medi-Cal benefit is amplifying interest in the [community health worker/ promotor/ representative \(CHW/P/R\) workforce](#) across the state. While community health workers and *promotores* have a long history of connecting and listening to those not well served by the traditional health care system, integrating their work into Medi-Cal comes with new opportunities and several challenges to fully realize this new benefit.

**"Supporting the CHW/P/R workforce, their skill set, their advocacy in hard-to-reach communities is essential to promoting health equity. The only way to address, mitigate, and eliminate disparities will be with this workforce."**  
—Timothy Watts, MPH, Health Equity Coordinator of the Santa Barbara County Public Health Department

A regional team from the Central Coast, encompassing Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, and Ventura Counties is finding that devoting their energy to unifying local organizations and listening to CHW/P/Rs are critical first steps as they seek to advance the impact of the CHW/P/R workforce in their region. The regional team is part of a statewide initiative, funded by CHCF and deployed by Health Leads, to advance the CHW/P/R workforce.



"As co-lead of the Central Coast CHW/P Capacity Building Collaborative, we are aware that our CHW/P workforce lives and works across our county borders in Ventura County to the south and San Luis Obispo County to the north," explained Rubayi Estes, Vice President, Programs, at the Santa Barbara Foundation. "We needed to establish this initiative as a regional effort to reach our

workforce where they work and live, so we integrated public health and nonprofit leadership in all three counties into our planning, convening and implementation.”

Led by the Santa Barbara Foundation and the Santa Barbara County Public Health Department, this Central Coast regional team has brought together several CHW/P/Rs, local health care providers, Medi-Cal managed care plans, and community-based organizations (CBOs) to understand their perspectives on investing in the highly effective community health worker and *promotor* workforce. The Central Coast CBC has chosen two learning questions to guide their efforts during the initiative:

- How might we support employment opportunities for CHW/P/Rs so that the workforce expands across the region?
- How might we support contracting and procurement procedures for CBOs so that they are positioned to invoice and receive payment for services provided to Medi-Cal enrollees?

**“This work requires more nuanced introspection than one might initially think. You need to understand the minutia of the day-to-day activities of the CHW/P, how they execute their work. You cannot truly support the workforce if you do not know what their work looks like,” — Timothy Watts, MPH, Health Equity Coordinator of the Santa Barbara County Public Health Department.**

The Central Coast regional collaboration 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 the Central Coast; Alameda County; 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.

Now, more than a year into the Capacity Building Collaborative, regional groups like the Central Coast team are learning that organizations have varying levels of readiness for this work and are finding that

being in partnership and setting up space to hear and learn from one another is critical in moving forward to support the CHW/P/R workforce.

“We see so many similarities across the diverse group of organizations participating in our collaborative. Despite the different specific focuses of each partner, we’ve discovered how closely unified we are in our values. We share common values and common motivations for this work,” said Jonnie William, PsyD, a licensed clinical psychologist, founder of Evolve Equity Psychology, Inc. in Carpinteria, and coordinator of the CHW/P/R regional effort.



Dr. Williams emphasized the importance of taking enough time to set specific goals for advancing a CHW/P/R workforce. Just as critical is a willingness to revisit and revise goals based on the needs and ambitions of local community-based organizations, health care providers, and managed care plans. They are conducting several focus groups with CHW/P/Rs and recently sent a survey to more than 80 organizations in their region. The goal is to use survey results as a baseline needs assessment that can be revisited to track progress and uncover new areas of focus.

Central Coast leaders agree there is much to be learned and shared, and that dedicated staff and resources are critical to supporting diverse organizations and people with different needs, especially regarding contracting with Medi-Cal managed care plans (MCPs). Only one Central Coast organization has an active MCP contract. However, the Central Coast team leaders have begun educating organizations in their region about how to contract and bill for this work so they are prepared to do so in the future. Central Coast team leaders recognize the importance of bringing together organizations that employ CHW/P/Rs with MCPs so that trust and shared understanding is established as a strong foundation for partnership.