

Community Health Worker Initiative | Year 6 (2024)

PIECING THE MOSAIC: STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY HEALTH THROUGH PARTNERSHIP

Project Goal: Advance health equity by improving access to culturally competent care within Chicago's rapidly diversifying western suburbs through training, strengthening, and sustaining local Community Health Workers.

Community Health Workers (CHWs) at the following organizations provide ongoing peer support and case management to navigate access to health care and achieve collaboratively developed health goals within an integrated, interdisciplinary care coordination team. CHWs and their supervisors participate in a learning collaborative to engage with one another and with content experts to strengthen their skills, referral networks, and knowledge.



Evolution and Power Building

Recognizing a shared goal to strengthen public health infrastructure, the CHW initiative grew in October 2024 to include the Cook County Department of Public Health (CCDPH). This partnership aligns efforts in a merged Suburban Cook County Learning Collaborative and pools public/private resources to ensure sustained support for the CHW workforce throughout the county.

The partnership has garnered national attention, with presentations at the American Public Health Association and the National Association of Community Health Workers' annual conferences. It has become a model for the way to unite the health department's expansive community reach with private philanthropy's flexibility and adaptability.

CHWs Reaching the Right Audience

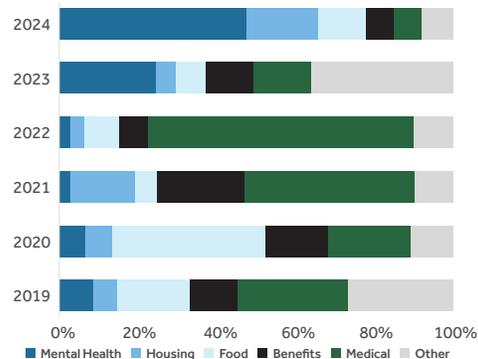
CHWs are increasingly engaging with individuals who need services the most, as demonstrated by a significant increase in client conversion rates. In 2024, 12% of contacts became clients—quadrupling the conversion rate from 2023 (3%). Although there were fewer overall contacts in 2024, the sharp increase in conversion underscores the quality and relevance of these connections.



Referral Trends and Community Needs

Referrals made by CHWs surged by 134% year-over-year, reflecting both growing demand and an increased capacity to respond to community needs. Referrals related to mental health and housing saw substantial increases, making them the top referral categories. These increases reflect overlapping and complex challenges community members face, where individuals often seek help for one issue but are connected to support for multiple needs. Additionally, food-related referrals in 2024 reached their highest levels since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, indicating persistent food insecurity and the continued importance of basic needs services.

Referrals over time by type



The Next Piece: From Progress to Permanence

Looking ahead to the rest of 2025 and beyond, expanding CHW support, strengthening cross-sector partnerships, and securing flexible funding will be critical, especially as the future of Medicaid and other government-funded programs remains uncertain.

Community Memorial Foundation, Healthy Communities Foundation, The Coleman Foundation and the Cook County Department of Public Health support the Community Health Worker Initiative. Health & Medicine Policy Research Group coordinates the project, with Sinai Urban Health Institute as trainer and educator.

