

The Future of Work and Health: Community Health Workers

On May 14, 2019, 60 Chicagoans of the public health community came together at the University of Illinois at Chicago School of Public Health for “On The Table” conversations around the Future of Work in Chicago. Participants composed memos on the Future of Work to Mayor Lightfoot to let her know what issues we want her to prioritize for action.

Describe the Topic: Community Health Workers

Specific Groups Discussed: Community Health Workers – across the city, suburbs, and state of Illinois

Neighborhoods/Communities of Focus: All neighborhoods

Who was at the table: Angela Ellison, UIC Office of Community Engagement and Neighborhood Health Partnerships; Guddi Kapadia, UIC School of Public Health; Barbara Julion, UIC College of Nursing; Chelsea Peters, UIC School of Public Health Global Health Program; Gabriela Pena, UIC Center for Clinical and Translational Science; Georgeen Polyak, Benedictine University; JoAnn Peso, Chicago Department of Public Health; Judith Sayad, UIC School of Public Health.

Views and opinions represented in this document are those of individuals not the organizations.

What about the topic or issue should be a priority for the mayor?

Community Health Workers (CHWs) have been part of the healthcare workforce since the early '80s. These are individuals who represent their communities through associated socioeconomic and sociocultural status. They are defined as bridges for patients and the clinical community, educators, interpreters, and advocates but they are also stigmatized as those with low or no education, non-professionals who are not paid for their impacts on the health of communities.

We recommend that Mayor Lightfoot:

The priority goals for addressing the issue of Community Health Workers would be to develop and implement a statewide standardized certification for CHWs and to develop and implement reimbursement rates from Medicare/Medicaid and private insurers for the employment of CHWs.

How does the issue connect to the values of equity, diversity, inclusion, transparency, accountability and transformation?

Addressing these workers will help to address:

1. **Equity** – For workers, for patients and for the overall health care system;
2. **Diversity** – CHWs come from communities and are most needed in diverse communities, it will help to increase the diversity of health care provision throughout the city
3. **Inclusion** – Being able to understand the complicated system of health care and navigating will increase inclusion of those populations that are typically marginalized when it comes to health care access

4. **Transparency** – Utilizing CHWs creates trust among and between patients, communities and clinical providers, creating transparency of care
5. **Accountability** – We are responsible as a society for the wellbeing of all members of society, this will help us be accountable for those that are again typically marginalized and not easy to connect
6. **Transformation** – Developing CHWs will transform the healthcare workforce, increase jobs within the city, change perceptions of providers and ultimately transform the city to a **healthy city**

What are the suggestions from the conversation for Chicago's new mayor to consider?

1. Support and fund current and future initiatives around addressing certification and training requirements for Community Health Workers
2. Support and funds current and future initiatives around addressing reimbursement requirements for Community Health Workers

How could the ideas and suggestions presented in this memo help make the Chicago region better for all Chicagoans?

1. Improve costs/funds
2. Improve the health
3. Aligned with Healthy Chicago 2020/2025