

Third Party Billing for Community Health Workers: Perspectives from Community-Based Organizations in Lane County, Oregon

Executive Summary

The Oregon Community Health Workers Association (ORCHWA) is in the early stages of developing infrastructure to enable third party billing (3PB) for community-based community health worker (CHW) services in Lane County as one strategy toward increasing sustainable funding for CHW services. Collective Health Strategies (CHS) was engaged to understand the current state of the CHW workforce in Lane County and gauge interest in 3PB for community-based organizations (CBOs). Between December 2022 - March 2023, CHS conducted outreach to community-based organizations in Lane County, completed 21 in-depth interviews with CBO leadership, and developed and fielded a short survey for CBO leadership and CHWs. Key questions for the project spanned the following topics:

- Funding for CHWs and CHW programs
- CBO interest in participating in third party billing
- State of the CHW workforce in Lane County
- CHW programs and characteristics in Lane County
- CBO experiences with health systems

Overall Findings

- **Lane County has strong local networks and collaborations:** The community in Lane County recognizes the importance of CHWs and has a strong desire to promote their work. There is collective energy around advancing and increasing recognition, pay, and where and how CHWs practice. There are many social services available and unique partnerships exist between CBOs, local government, and health systems (CCOs, clinics, hospitals), making Lane County a strong candidate for collaboration to improve sustainable funding sources for CHW services. Further, CBOs are growing their services and new CBOs are developing to fill identified gaps in the needs of the community.
- **CHWs are an essential part of the community:** CHW roles are prevalent, but the title and certification is less common. CHWs and people doing CHW work have a wide scope of practice that most commonly includes:
 - Connections to and support accessing social services, resources, and medical care
 - Outreach and education to clients, including chronic disease management, health screening
 - Case management or coordination
 - Building trust, relationships, resiliency, and advocating for clients
- **There are many opportunities for CHWs in Lane County:** CHW capacity is limited at the individual and community levels, primarily due to a lack of sustainable funding opportunities. More resources, support, and funding are needed to support this work. Sustainable funding and CHW training are two of the top challenges for CBOs working with or looking for CHWs. Clarifying the role and scope of a CHW are also important, especially as the opportunity for Medicaid billing becomes more widely known and CBOs learn how to take advantage of billing.

- **Relationships with health systems represent both opportunity and concern:** Despite widespread partnership with health systems in Lane County, CBOs have significant concerns about how partnerships can or do work. The complexities of health systems are a top barrier for CBOs. CBO leadership are especially attuned to the challenges individual CHWs face when going up against systems-level issues and recognize serious inequity in the value of CHW work for clients and communities compared with the financial value healthcare systems place on CHWs. While Medicaid billing is seen as a significant opportunity by CBO leadership and CHWs alike, uncertainty about the logistics of how billing works, what services are approved for billing, and the fee-for-service model as a whole are concerning for CBOs.

Recommendations

CBO leadership interviewed and surveyed for this project indicated interest in third party billing (3PB) as a way to improve the sustainability of CHW staffing, services, and programs. Lane County's unique energy around addressing the social determinants of health through community-based social services, along with the diverse geography, encompassing larger cities and rural areas, makes it a great location to begin the 3PB Program. Education, resources, and continued engagement with CBO staff and CHWs will be required for ORCHWA to successfully develop the 3PB Program in Lane County.

Specific recommendations that would support ORCHWA's development of the 3PB Program in Lane County include:

- Continue to build trust and relationships with CBOs and CHWs in Lane County
- Support and strengthen existing networks of outreach workers, CHWs, and CBOs
- Educate CBO staff and leadership on:
 - the scope of work for CHWs in Oregon,
 - define and differentiate the CHW role from other types of traditional health workers,
 - how Medicaid billing for CHW services works practically, including what services can be billed and what restrictions exist, and
 - demonstrate how 3PB is possible and can benefit CBOs and their staff.
- Prioritize systems-change efforts that advance expanded sustainable funding opportunities and continued advancement of CHWs and the role broadly

Recommendations are also provided for the Oregon state government and health systems partners.



The Oregon State government should:

- Expand the role of CHWs
- Improve the THW registry
- Support workforce development
- Offer stable funding opportunities
- Improve coordination and connections across systems



Health systems partnerships should:

- Create career pathways for CHWs
- Improve knowledge about CHWs
- Reduce administrative burden on CBOs
- Support community-based CHW work
- Provide accessible, sustainable funding for community-based CHWs
- Clearly share opportunities for health systems-CBO partnerships
- Look to CHWs to inform upstream SDOH investments