



Massachusetts Association of Community Health Workers

c/o Massachusetts Public Health Association

434 Jamaicaway, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130

Press Release

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For more information:

Cindy Marti: (617) 524-6696, ext. 108

Rallying After Inclusion in US Health Reform

Community Health Workers Unite to Push Workforce Legislation

Boston, MA – March 24, 2010 – With the excitement of changes in the nation’s health systems in the air, community health workers (CHWs) from around the Commonwealth gathered at the State House today to highlight their contributions to public health and health care. Representatives of this diverse workforce were joined by nurses, health care administrators, and physicians. They were there to support House Bill 4130, an *Act to Establish a Board of Certification of Community Health Workers*. After the rally, supporters met with their legislators and members of the Joint Committee on Health Care Financing to advocate for the passage of H4130.

The day commenced with Representative Gloria Fox (D – Seventh Suffolk) advocating that “decreasing health disparities and improving healthcare quality are just two reasons why the passage of my bill H4130 is so important. Nationally community health workers are recognized for the vital role they play in all communities, this is a historical time for healthcare in America. NOW is the time to pass H4130 in Massachusetts!”

In addition, community health worker Lorenza Holt urged legislators at the rally to support H4130. “H4130 matters to legislators and communities because it strengthens the profession of community health workers who directly strengthen the health of our communities. CHWs understand that training and certification are closely linked and we are always seeking opportunities to become more effective at what we do. Certification will also help employers and payers understand the unique skills CHWs have and the scope of services we provide.” Furthermore, Ms. Holt added “H4130 is designed to incorporate significant CHW input in the board to ensure that the process will be as inclusionary as possible.” Ms. Holt is a board member of MA Association of Community Health Workers and is the executive director of Boston Association for Childbirth Education.

Dr. Pano Yeracaris, the vice president and chief medical officer at Network Health, a Medicaid managed care organization serving Massachusetts' residents, stated “successful lifestyle change is the most effective way to promote health and requires daily attention. This is especially true for vulnerable populations. Community health workers can play a crucial part in this effort and there is great value in establishing a structured certificate program to guide and train this important community resource.”

CHWs were also recognized at the rally by the MA Department of Public Health. “Massachusetts has some of the most capable and well organized CHW leaders and advocates in the country. As we address the needs of vulnerable populations and tackle issues of access, cost, and quality under Massachusetts health care reform, the Department of Public Health is proud to support community health workers,” said

Geoffrey is Senior Policy Advisor for Commissioner Auerbach at the MA Department of Public Health.

Dawn Heffernan, a nurse and Diabetes Health Educator at the Holyoke Health Center spoke about the essential role CHWs play. “Community Health Workers were a key component to effective patient self management in our diabetes self-management program. As a result of the success of our CHW programming on improving patient outcomes, Holyoke Health Center’s senior leadership made a commitment to support the model even after the grant funding had ended. Our executive director and medical director encourage the incorporation of the CHW model into other programs throughout our organization. Currently, CHWs work in our medication therapy management, low vision, healthy weight, women’s health and health access programming. They are critical to the success of these programs.”

Recognizing that not everyone is familiar with the CHW term, Ms. Holt explained to the audience, “community health workers are frontline public health workers that connect hard to reach people to health, public health and human services. As trusted members of the community, we build individual and community capacity through outreach, health education, social support, informal counseling and advocacy. We are skilled and knowledgeable of the languages, cultures, and opportunities of our communities.”

When asked about the significance of the day Meiko Rollins said, "As a Community Health Worker in ABCD, Inc.'s The New Career's CHW Initiative of Boston, I feel the work we do was acknowledge and respected for the contributions to our communities. I was so surprised that Representative Gloria Fox invited us into the House Chamber and introduced us as her guests for the day. It was great, and all the legislators stood up and gave us a standing ovation for the important work we do!"

Community Health Worker Day at the State House was organized by the Massachusetts Association of Community Health Workers (MACHW). MACHW is the statewide association for community health workers, providing voice and leading the movement to strengthen the CHW workforce.

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About the Massachusetts Association of Community Health Workers (MACHW)

MACHW is a statewide network of community health workers (CHWs) from all disciplines. We were founded in March 2000 to enable CHWs to lead the movement to organize, define and strengthen the profession of community health work. MACHW's mission is to strengthen the professional identity of community health workers, foster leadership among CHWs, and promote the integration of CHWs into the health care, public health and human service workforce. MACHW achieves its mission through education, research, policy development and advocacy. A community health worker is a public health professional who promotes full and equal access to necessary health and social services by applying his or her unique understanding of the experiences, language and culture of the communities he or she serves. More information can be found at www.machw.org .