



September 5, 2008

POLICY BRIEF: Part 3 of 3

Position: Massachusetts Association of Community Health Workers is **in support** for the creation of a **certificate program** for community health workers.

As the statewide professional association for community health workers, Massachusetts Association of Community Health Workers (MACHW) reached out to community health workers (CHWs) across the Commonwealth and learned that CHWs are in support of a certificate program. MACHW gathered opinions from CHWs by hosting a series of seven regional meetings across the commonwealth. The meetings were held in Boston, Great Barrington, Hyannis, Lowell, New Bedford, Springfield, and Worcester. In total there were 132 participants, 93 of which identified themselves as CHWs. These regional meetings were created to ensure that the voices of CHWs guide the Massachusetts Department of Public Health in making recommendations to the legislature regarding the training and certification of CHWs.¹

Recommendations:

Training and Education Structure:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training and education should be based on core competencies • Training and education should be available in all regions of the state and include local resources • Training and education should be focused on education strategies appropriate for adult learners • CHWs must be engaged to develop the curriculum • CHWs should co-facilitate the trainings • Curriculum must be flexible to enable trainers to meet the needs of participants and local communities • Training and education for the certificate need to view health holistically • Training, education and evaluation of CHWs must flexible enable CHWs with limited English or writing skills can still excel • Training and education should include a mentorship component • Trainings should be held in community-based settings • College credit should be available to all CHWs completing the certificate program
Certificate Basics:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CHW certificate must be portable across Massachusetts • Core CHW training must be available statewide • Barriers to obtaining the certificate must be limited • Effective CHWs that have many years of experience should be “grandfathered” in • Certificate should have the potential to be expanded in the future to demonstrate varying levels of CHW expertise • Certificate programs should be evaluated on a regular basis to ensure quality

¹ See Section 110 of Chapter 58 of the Acts of 2006, Massachusetts Legislature.

Expected Benefits of Certificate:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase access to training and education • Enhance skills and knowledge of CHWs • Validate importance of workforce • Encourage opportunities for advancement in field • Set standards for the field • Increase compensation for CHWs • Proliferate sustainable funding streams for the workforce
Employer Relations:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certificate must not be required before hire • There should be a grace period of working at least 6 to 18 months before requiring training for the certificate • Employers should give release time for CHWs to attend trainings • Supervisors of CHWs should also receive some training so that can best support and supervise their employees • Sufficient funding should be sought to cover the majority of the cost of trainings to eliminate financial barrier for CHWs
Precautions:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater value must still be placed on a CHW's connection to the community • Barriers must not be created that will alter the composition of the workforce • Standards must be carefully set so that the scope of services does not change

Conclusion: MACHW supports the creation of a certificate program for community health workers. The majority of CHWs are in favor of certification with the expectation that it will improve the workforce development of CHWs. To ensure that a certificate program is valued by and beneficial to the workforce, CHWs must be involved at each stage of the planning, implementation, and evaluation process.