

COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS & PROMOTORES IN THE FUTURE OF MEDI-CAL

*CHW/P Training Approaches
Project Newsletter #2*

CHW/P TRAINING IS ULTIMATELY ABOUT EMPLOYMENT

CONVERSATIONS WITH SILVIA ORTEGA AND VICTOR MURRAY

In each of these conversations, we learn from a California expert and an out-of-state expert. Silvia Ortega is the first graduate of the San Bernardino County-based Promotores Academy to return as an instructor. In her teaching role, she developed curriculum based on her own experiences working as the first neonatal intensive care unit (NICU)-based CHW/P in the nation.

Victor Murray has worked with the Camden Coalition of Healthcare Providers in Camden, New Jersey for 11 years. He began as a field worker and has advanced to senior director of Community Engagement & Capacity Building, a leadership role in which he oversees the organization's CHW/P programs.

We spoke with both leaders to understand CHW/P training best practices and how to prepare health care organizations for working with CHW/Ps.

Like most CHW/Ps with whom we have spoken, Silvia is a natural leader. She recently finished a term as the first Latina elected to her local school board in a district where more than 80% of the students are Latinx. She believes the same skill set that prepared her for public service also prepared her to be a CHW/P.

PROJECT DATES OF INTEREST

April 12

Draft Resource Package #3 on CHW/P program data and outcomes posted for public comment

April 12 - 20

Public comment period on Draft Resource Package #3 on CHW/P program data and outcomes

April 20

Release of Final Resource Package #2 on CHW/P training programs



Silvia Ortega (R) teaching a CHW/P course at Promotores Academy.

With the goal of achieving health equity for Medi-Cal members, the Community Health Workers & Promotores in the Future of Medi-Cal project will generate a set of four resource packages, informed and reviewed by stakeholders, that support CHW/Ps' integration into Medi-Cal managed care programs. The first resource package will cover the various roles CHW/Ps play.

CONVERSATIONS CONTINUED ...

Silvia refers to her community health work as a "calling" and is grateful to be able to "really fulfill that passion that I have for public health as well as public education" through her service as both a community health worker and former member of the local school board.

Before finding the Promotores Academy, "I didn't know there was a name for community health work," said Silvia. She was attending college when she experienced personal health issues that led her to take a break from coursework. During that break, she took what the Academy called "basic training" for *promotores* at a community center in Loma Linda.

Promotores Academy was founded through a community partnership in 2011. Five years later, Loma Linda University Health established the San Manuel Gateway College with a mission to "provide the Inland Empire with entry-level job training and educational opportunities in the medical field" and incorporated the Promotores Academy into its programs, along with certificate programs for those seeking to become certified nursing assistants, medical assistants, pharmacy techs, and surgical techs.

The Camden Coalition has experienced similar growth. When Victor started as a field worker, which he describes as being similar to a CHW/P role, the organization had six employees. Today, there are 80 employees. The Camden Coalition's mission is "to spark a field and movement that unites communities of caregivers in Camden and across the nation to improve the well-being of individuals with complex health and social needs." CHW/Ps are a key component of the interdisciplinary care teams that make up the heart of the Camden Core Model.

CHW/P Curriculum Should Both Draw Upon and Support CHW/Ps' Lived Experience

Both Silvia and Victor have experience developing CHW/P training curricula. When Silvia was invited back to Promotores Academy as an instructor, she was also invited to serve on a committee that developed a behavioral health track for the CHW/P curriculum. She teaches part of the curriculum and is now translating the basic training curriculum into Spanish.

"I started calling myself the 'rootologist' because I couldn't help address any issues until I understood the root causes."

- Silvia Ortega

For Silvia the most important part of a CHW/P training program is "putting yourself in the shoes of a community member, working on a popular education philosophy where you're building on what they bring."

The New Jersey Department of Health is leading a statewide initiative to develop a CHW/P certification program. There are three branches of the initiative: curriculum, employment retention and recruitment, and sustainability (payment). Victor serves as chair of the curriculum development committee. The goal of the initiative is for CHW/P services to be able to be reimbursed by Medicaid in New Jersey.

For Victor, the key to a successful CHW/P training program, and an element he has built into Camden's CHW/P training program, is equipping CHW/Ps with the ability to "deal with their own stuff." He explained, "A pet peeve is that we ask people to do incredibly hard work without equipping or supporting them to meet our goals . . . CHWs have a connection with the community and are bringing their personal challenges to their work, so we need to build in supports for them, too."

Training from a Place of Humility

Humility is the most important aspect of a CHW/P trainer, according to both experts. Silvia said, "You have to humble yourself and be one with the community. You must be able to humbly say: 'I'm here to learn from the process of training someone.'"

CONVERSATIONS CONTINUED ...

On the topic of trainers, Victor agreed: "One thing I try to be mindful of is that everyone is an expert based on their experience and what they bring. It's important to be mindful of what others bring to the discussion." The ability to put oneself in the learner role is key to success as a CHW/P trainer.

Let CHW/Ps Be Your Messengers

Victor's advice to those working to develop training programs is to do the real community engagement work of getting CHW/Ps involved from the beginning. The Camden Coalition was very intentional about including CHW/Ps throughout the process of developing their program because: "That's what they do. That's what they're good at — being incredible messengers!"

Silvia reiterated that drawing on CHW/P students' lived experience is critical to developing a curriculum. She also emphasized the importance of including practical applications, such as role playing and a practicum, as components of any training program. Motivational interviewing is a technique Silvia believes should be taught but also used in the classroom to make the training more rich and personal.

Working with Managed Care Plans

Prior to her return to the Academy, Silvia spent two years as a CHW/P in the NICU of the Loma Linda University Children's Hospital. In that role, she worked with case managers at the local Medi-Cal managed care plan (MCP) in her area. Part of her role was helping the families in the NICU



Victor Murray (R) working with colleagues at the Camden Coalition. (Photo: Lynsey Addario)

navigate the Medi-Cal system and communicating the health system terminology in language the MCP members could understand. Silvia believes MCPs and CHW/Ps can work well together if they are speaking the same language. She explained, "My major was in business. The ROI is there [for the MCPs]. For example, if babies don't have a car seat, we can't send them home. It would be very expensive for them to stay in the ICU until they had a car seat, and I could get them a car seat." Understanding how to demonstrate the value of CHW/P work to the MCP case workers proved vital.

The Camden Coalition is working with an MCP in New Jersey to train its CHW/P workforce right now. Similar to Silvia's experience, Victor shared that learning to communicate was critical to their partnership. "The cultures [between MCPs and CHW/P training organizations] can be very different. How are we identifying the people we serve? What language are we using?" Once they were able to develop a shared vocabulary and set of goals, they were set up for success.

Training Leads to Employment

When asked whether she believes California should adopt a CHW/P training and/or certification program, Silvia answered affirmatively: "I think it's important - not to force people to [take the training] but to formalize it. To get paid for our work, it's important to formalize the profession and become part of the workforce."

Victor suggested that thinking about the structure of a CHW/P training or certification program is important. "Whether that needs to include a formal certification process [is another question]. In New Jersey, we think that is a way to do it. Is it the only way? No. At the end of the day, people want to get paid." One thing he believes New Jersey has done well is pulling in other organizations, so people didn't feel like the curriculum was being imposed by the state, but rather, they were building it together.

What is the most important thing to know about CHW/P training, according to Victor? "Pay them! . . . They do hard work. You have to pay them!" Silvia agrees; jobs with living wages are needed for those who train to be CHW/Ps.

LESSONS FROM THE PROJECT

LATE WINTER HIGHLIGHTS

Project contributors and the Project Team have been hard at work in February and March.

Resource Package #1: The Role of CHW/Ps in Health Care Delivery for Medi-Cal Members (PDF) was released in its final form.

Resource Package #2: Training Approaches for Community Health Workers and Promotores to Support Medi-Cal Members (PDF) was drafted using resources provided by Advisory Council members, posted for public comment, and reviewed by the Stakeholder Group. A final version of this resource package will be released on April 20.

A draft of Resource Package #3 on CHW/Ps' contribution to capturing program data and measuring outcomes will be posted for public comment on April 12 (with comments due by April 19).

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE PROJECT

[Visit the Project Microsite](#)

[Read the Resource Packages](#)

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RESOURCE PACKAGE #2 TOOLS OF NOTE

[Whole Person Care: The Essential Role of Community Health Workers and Peers \(PDF\)](#)

[Preparing Community Health Workers for Their Role as Agents of Social Change: Experience of the Community Capacitation Center \(PDF\)](#)

Health Plan Council

The Project Team also hosted the first full Health Plan Council meeting, where Medi-Cal MCP executives heard a presentation from a former MCP executive in Oregon who led development of a Medicaid-funded CHW/P initiative and discussed their own experiences both in California and in other states. [Watch a video of the presentation on our project microsite.](#)

CHW/P Convening

Perhaps most exciting, the Project Team hosted a CHW/P Convening on February 24. Fifty-seven California CHW/Ps attended virtually and shared their experiences with Medi-Cal and insights on integrating CHW/Ps into Medi-Cal managed care programs.

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