**Inaugural Training for Iowa Community Health Workers**

More than 40 frontline health workers registered for Iowa’s first C.O.R.E. Training program for community health workers (CHWs) this March. The three-day program, held March 28-30 at the State Hygienic Lab in Ankeny, was designed and hosted by the Iowa Chronic Care Consortium (ICCC). The training was made possible in part by a grant from the Mid-Iowa Health Foundation. Member organizations of the Iowa Community Health Worker Alliance served as advisors for the curriculum development.

CHWs are uniquely positioned to help individuals and communities achieve better health outcomes, especially those who are underserved and hardest hit by negative socioeconomic determinants of health. CHWs typically come from and are trusted by the communities they serve and help other members of the health team bridge cultural and literacy barriers.

CHWs serve as connectors, navigators, and coaches to help link individuals and communities to health care and social services. They create a continuous loop of facilitation, support, and feedback for those receiving and providing health care and social services. CHWs encourage individuals to self-activate in setting and achieving health goals.

In Iowa, CHWs are employed at hospitals and clinics, and by agencies, health plans, and managed care organizations. They may be known as navigators, outreach workers, care guides, community health advisors, peer educators, promotora, and other roles. Although there is general support for such frontline health workers, there has been no concerted statewide leadership in Iowa to recognize this segment of the workforce and provide program and training initiatives to encourage the advancement and employment of CHWs.

Across the nation, 40 states are actively taking steps to incorporate CHW into health care systems, according to the National Academy for State Health Policy. Steps include financing, training and education, certification, and definitions, roles, and scope of practice, The Iowa Community Health Worker Alliance has been meeting periodically to discuss ways to develop the CHW workforce in the state.

The March training was an inaugural experience intended to gather current frontline health workers for learning, information sharing, and networking. “Attendees had a wide range of roles, levels of experience, and education,” says Dr. William Appelgate, executive director of ICCC. “They all share a deep commitment to helping their clients and patients within their communities.

“Given the ‘triple aim’ of improving the experience of care, improving health outcomes, and reducing costs per person, community health workers are uniquely positioned to be part of the solution. Iowa will benefit from expanding this segment of the health workforce, especially by providing opportunities to those with less than a bachelor’s degree.”

Iowa Workforce Development estimated that in 2016, there were 390 CHWs, with an entry wage of $11.25 per hour and an experienced wage of $21.07 per hour. According to the University of Iowa’s Iowa Health Careers website, the average salary for CHWs is $32,000 and the average college education is less than 1 year.

Some participant comments about the benefits of the three-day training experience include:

* “We were recognized as a crucial element of the health care continuum and that was reiterated from all professionals there.”
* “Lots of collaboration between organizations.”
* “The energy and sincere willingness to help others. The thought that we are all working together from different counties.”

Participants included CHWs from Amerihealth Caritas Iowa, Central Iowa Works, Connections Area Agency on Aging, Dallas County Public Health and Nursing Services, Delta Dental of Iowa, Eastern Iowa Health Center, Ethnic Minorities of Burma Advocacy and Resource Center, FRIENDS, the Health Care Collaborative of Rural Missouri, Iowa Department of Public Health, Linn County Health Department, Primary Health Care, and United Community Health Center.

Exhibitors included Amerigroup, Iowa Cancer Consortium, Iowa Department of Public Health, Iowa Primary Care Association, Lifelong Links/Iowa Association of Area Agencies on Aging, SafeNet Rx, and United Healthcare.

Faculty for the event were William Appelgate, PhD, CPC; Liani Cherput, Chris Espersen; Priscilla Gilbert, Shelley Horak, MPH; Deb Kazmerzak; Noreen O’Shea, DO; Kelly Rawlings; Meagan Schorr, MPH, CHES; and Alicia Soppe. CHW panelists included Vivian De Gonzalez and Lian Thang Puii.

ICCC hopes to offer future training opportunities. If you’re interested in participating as a learner, faculty member, exhibitor, host, or funder, please contact Deb Kazmerzak at

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