

Spotlight: Recruiting and Training Community Health Workers at Molina Healthcare

Many health care organizations employ Community Health Workers (CHWs) to connect the individuals they serve to health and social services.¹ Within these organizations, CHWs provide critical supports to individuals with complex health and social needs, including many individuals dually eligible for Medicare and Medicaid. To ensure CHWs can successfully fulfill this role, organizations need to recruit and train individuals with a passion for engaging individuals in their own health, an understanding of the assets and needs of the community, and skills for identifying and addressing social and environmental factors that may negatively impact an individual's health.

Molina Healthcare, which serves over 50,000 dually eligible members in Medicare-Medicaid Plans across six states, has employed community health workers, known as Community Connectors, since 2004. This Spotlight highlights successful practices that Molina uses to recruit and train Community Connectors. Health plans, health systems, and providers may consider these strategies as they develop and implement CHW programs.

Recruitment

Health care organizations looking to employ CHWs may consider the following recruitment strategies:

- **Recruiting qualified individuals who have lived experience with the community and its resources.** CHWs often gain lived experience through their own lives, or through the experiences of family members or friends. Having lived experiences in the communities they serve helps CHWs relate to members on a personal level and engage members empathetically. Molina views a Community Connector's ability to connect authentically with members as a priority in hiring.
- **Recruiting for the key skills and competencies needed to successfully engage members.** Based on years of experience with their Community Connector program across the country, Molina highlights the following as key competencies when hiring Community Connectors (CHWs) who can successfully engage members:
 - A deep sense of empathy when working with vulnerable and marginalized populations
 - Ability to establish rapport and trust with a diverse group of people, and the talent and desire to engage members in their own health
 - Ability to operate independently as a remote employee in the field as well as collaboratively in an interdisciplinary care team
 - Knowledge of medical terminology and the healthcare system, but able to engage with members in a person-centered manner in plain language

¹ American Public Health Association (APHA), (2019). *Community Health Workers*. Retrieved from <https://www.apha.org/apha-communities/member-sections/community-health-workers>.

- Prior experience in health care settings or community-based organizations is helpful, but not necessary
 - Ability to communicate with a wide range of stakeholders – from medical directors to members
 - Ability to build and sustain relationships within the community being served
 - Knowledge of community culture, as well as community resources and social services
 - Bilingual, depending on the language needs of members
- **Obtaining referrals from individuals familiar with skills needed for success as a CHW.** Molina strengthens their Community Connector workforce through referrals from current employees-including Community Connector peers, case managers, other care team members, and local providers. This network has helped to expand the number of Community Connectors with vital knowledge of community resources and organizations.

Training

Health care organizations may consider the following training practices for CHWs:

- **Training CHWs on helping members address social needs as a complement to medical care.** Training CHWs on engaging members and establishing trust can help members feel more open to sharing their social needs. This information can help CHWs partner with members to address the members' needs.
 - Molina's motivational interviewing training helps Community Connectors encourage members to make progress in reaching both their personal and health-related goals. Community Connectors find motivational interviewing particularly useful when encouraging members to participate in adult day programs and other services that they may initially hesitate to join.
 - Ensure that CHWs have robust knowledge of a wide range of community resources and know how to connect members to those resources. Molina Community Connectors link their members with food banks, meal programs, shelters (for those experiencing homelessness), and other health and social services. Community Connectors can access information for these community-specific resources through external resource platforms and an internal shared database with resources and points of contact from local organizations.

A Molina enrollee was experiencing high blood pressure. Because his Community Connector was trained to recognize underlying social needs, she worked with the member to identify that he was stressed due to his financial situation. The Community Connector was able to refer the member to a local church that helped him financially. She also worked with the member to help him apply for Social Security. As his financial situation improved, the member's blood pressure decreased.

- Encourage CHWs to attend meetings hosted by local Area Agencies on Aging and other community organizations with firsthand experience addressing the social needs of vulnerable populations. After attending external organizations' meetings, Molina Community Connectors will often host trainings for other Community Connectors to share strategies they learned.
- **Highlighting the specific needs of dually eligible members with CHWs during training.** While many Community Connectors have general experience in health care settings, Molina also trains Community Connectors on the specific needs of dually eligible individuals. For example, Molina trains Community Connectors working with dually eligible members on the following topics:
 - Meeting the needs of individuals with disabilities and individuals with behavioral health conditions
 - Recognizing the signs and symptoms of Alzheimer's disease and related dementias
 - Identifying the effects of social isolation among older adults and encouraging participation in adult day programs for socialization
 - Understanding cultural variations in perspectives on aging and family involvement
- **Promoting a collaborative learning environment and multiple training approaches for CHWs.** Molina aims to create a supportive learning culture for Community Connectors through multiple training opportunities, including:
 - Interdisciplinary care team trainings
 - One-on-one coaching by supervisors
 - Cross-training opportunities between Community Connectors
 - Presentations from community-based organizations
 - An internal resource library with internal and external training resources

Additional Resources

These resources provide additional information on Community Connectors at Molina Healthcare.

- **[Community Connector Intervention Reference Guide](#)**: This document details the four main competencies of a successful Community Connector at Molina: community knowledge, health coaching, capacity building, and outreach.
<https://www.molinahealthcare.com/providers/common/medicare/PDF/community-connector-flyer.pdf>
- **[Molina Healthcare of Florida Community Connector Program](#)**: This presentation includes information on the role and functions of Community Connectors in Molina’s care management and coordination model, characteristics of successful Community Connectors, and success stories.
http://www.myfloridaegro.com/Resources/Qtr_Mtg_May17/Molina%20Healthcare%20of%20Florida%20Community%20Connector%20Program.pdf
- **[True Molina Stories – Gayla](#)**: This video demonstrates the value of Community Connectors partnering with care coordinators to deliver more comprehensive care to members, including addressing the medical, social, and environmental needs of members.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WPt1HRKKiY&t=2s>

The Medicare-Medicaid Coordination Office (MMCO) in the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) seeks to help beneficiaries dually eligible for Medicare and Medicaid have access to seamless, high-quality health care that includes the full range of covered services in both programs. This brief is intended to support health plans and providers in integrating and coordinating care for dually eligible beneficiaries. It does not convey current or anticipated health plan or provider requirements. For additional information, please go to <https://www.resourcesforintegratedcare.com/>.