

## Prioritizing Community Health Workers in the COVID-19 Response

Dear Member of Congress:

Every corner of America has been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic– but we have not yet seen the full impact. Unemployment, deferred preventive care, stress and social isolation could create an even more devastating second wave of the crisis. To mitigate this, we urge Congress to include community health workers – trusted laypeople who support the health of individuals and families – as a central part of our country’s recovery. This workforce can help to re-open our economy and restore normalcy in our communities through public health messaging and contact tracing, while also addressing broader social, economic, behavioral, and preventive health needs.

**We strongly urge Congress to add community health worker services as an optional benefit in the Medicaid program with an increased Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP) for states and territories, as well as provide rapid funding for state and local health departments to deploy a community-based workforce in immediate response.**

Even before COVID-19, a growing number of community and healthcare organizations [have been hiring community health workers](#) as evidence of their effectiveness mounted, including:

- **Proven return on investment.** Multiple randomized clinical trials showed that community health workers [improve health](#) while reducing costly [hospitalizations](#) and saving state Medicaid \$4,200 per beneficiary. If scaled to even a quarter of U.S. Medicaid beneficiaries, community health workers would save [taxpayers \\$78 billion annually](#).
- **Rapid job creation.** Community health workers can be hired, trained and deployed within weeks. With stimulus and Medicaid funding, healthcare and community-based organizations could quickly deploy thousands of unemployed Americans into this workforce.
- **Critical capacity.** Community health workers are cost-effective and provide a range of health and social services, which will help hospitals and communities stay afloat.

Right now, [most Medicaid programs typically do not reimburse community health workers](#), or do so through [limited demonstration projects or waivers](#). Congress needs to act to ensure that states include these services as a critical component of their immediate pandemic recovery and long-term resilience strategy. In the next pandemic response package, we urge you to:

- **Add community health worker services as an optional benefit in Medicaid, as well as provide increased FMAP to states and territories for these services.**
- **Provide \$3.6 billion in funding for states through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to hire and equip a community-based workforce for rapid response contact tracing and support.**

Swift, bold action from Congress to deploy community health workers will stem a public health crisis, generate a return on public dollars, help keep healthcare organizations afloat and put people back to work.

We, the undersigned, thank you for your leadership on these issues.

Sincerely,



Shreya Kangovi MD MS

Associate Professor of Medicine, University of Pennsylvania  
Executive Director, Penn Center for Community Health Workers