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Illinois Community Health Worker Program Receives New Funding from Illinois Department of Public Health

Community Health Workers led by Illinois Public Health Association and Illinois Primary Health Care Association helped more than 137,000 people quarantined by COVID-19

SPRINGFIELD, Illinois – A vast network of Community Health Workers trained by the Illinois Public Health Association and Illinois Primary Health Care Association to address health equity gaps during the COVID-19 pandemic will continue offering resources in the Prairie State thanks to new support from the U.S. Center for Disease Control Prevention and the Illinois Department of Public Health.

Leaders from Illinois' response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including Dr. Tracey Smith of IPHA and Ollie Idowu of the IPHCA, joined Gov. JB Pritzker's administration today to announce the COVID Health Equity Pandemic Health Navigator Project - \$10 million program allowing Community Health Workers to continue connecting vulnerable constituents with basic human needs and health resources. Dr. Smith said Community Health Workers were a crucial component to Illinois' COVID-19 mitigation efforts whose usefulness goes far beyond the pandemic.

"Community Health Workers are a trusted source for communities dealing with long-standing health equity issues in Illinois," said Dr. Tracey Smith, who serves as director of community health at the Illinois Public Health Association. "Many of the Community Health Workers we hired during the COVID-19 pandemic have already found positions utilizing the skillsets our training provides. We are grateful to IDPH for enabling us to continue this work and further strengthening Illinois' public health infrastructure."

Community Health Workers are frontline public health champions with a close understanding of services and needs in the areas they serve. More than 650 Illinoisans completed the Illinois Public Health Association's training program to become Community Health Workers in the Pritzker administration's Pandemic Health Navigator Program. With this training, Community Health Workers bolstered the State of Illinois' contact tracing and mass-vaccination efforts. They also applied their knowledge of available resources to connect tens of thousands of people quarantined by COVID-19 with basic human needs, such as food, medicine, and safe shelter.

"Illinois is fortunate to have a trained and active Community Health Workforce supported by federally qualified health centers, local health departments, providers and community-based organizations," said Laura Vaught, IDPH chief of staff. "With U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention Health Disparities funding, our COVID-19 pandemic response programs can realign to meet needs throughout Illinois."

The COVID Health Equity Pandemic Health Navigator Project will be available in 27 Illinois counties, including Alexander, Boone, Cass, Clay, Douglas, Fayette, Franklin, Hardin, Henderson, Jackson, Jefferson,



Kane, Kankakee, Lake, Lawrence, Macon, Marion, Perry, Pope, Pulaski, Rock Island, St. Clair, Saline, Union, Vermilion, White and Winnebago.

“Federally qualified health centers and community-based organizations have been at the heart of Illinois’ COVID-19 response since day one, and we appreciate the trust and support they have received from IDPH,” said Ollie Idowu, President and CEO of the Illinois Primary Health Care Association. “We are proud to be a part of this phenomenally successful program providing care coordination, health resources and counsel people need to navigate the many traumas COVID-19 presents.”

Community Health Workers fulfill 137,000 COVID-19 resource requests

More than 137,000 people sidelined by a COVID-19 infection or exposure received assistance from Community Health Workers since March 2021, according to new data from the Illinois Public Health Association. In most cases, those requests were fulfilled within 48 hours of their receipt.

Community Health Workers also hosted health fairs and vaccine clinics in workplaces and neighborhoods with few health care options. Dr. Smith said many of these resource requests came from Illinois’ less densely populated areas and communities with more limited access to care.

A survey conducted by the Illinois Public Health Association of Community Health Workers found that roughly 40 percent of those hired under the Pandemic Health Navigator Program were previously unemployed. Nearly 60 percent of the survey’s respondents said their racial identity was non-white.

More Community Health Worker certification programs coming soon

Among those inspired by the vast network and abilities of Community Health Workers potential were the Governor and members of Illinois’ citizen legislature.

[Public Act 102-0004](#), which Gov. Pritzker signed in April 2021, calls for the creation of Community Health Worker certification programs at Illinois colleges and universities. Appointments to a regulatory board charged with overseeing these certification programs are being finalized. The Act also identifies longstanding health equity needs Community Health Workers could address, such as asthma, diabetes, maternal health, behavioral health and social determinants to quality medical care.

About the Illinois Public Health Association

The Illinois Public Health Association is the oldest and largest public health association in the State of Illinois. As one of the largest affiliates of the American Public Health Association, IPHA is widely recognized as a leader in the field of public health advocacy, health education, and promotion.

About the Illinois Primary Health Care Association

As the sole nonprofit trade association representing Illinois’ Community and Migrant Health Centers, IPHCA serves to improve the health status of medically underserved populations by fostering the provision of high-quality, comprehensive health care that is accessible, coordinated, community-directed, culturally sensitive, and linguistically appropriate. IPHCA provides training and technical assistance to existing and potential Health Center Program award recipients and look-alikes.

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