

Enhancing Refugee, Immigrant, and Migrant (RIM)-focused services and supporting Community Health Workers (CHWs) on their path to certification

The initial aim of the [Steele County Public Health Department](#). Based CHW/PHN Dyad Project (SCPHD) pilot was to broaden COVID-19 vaccine access and uptake among the Somali and Latinx communities in Steele County and evaluate the impact of the CHW/PHN dyad in meeting this objective. Through the course of the pilot and as opportunities to troubleshoot a problematic cycle contributing to a shortage of certified community health workers (CHW) were recognized, a secondary project purpose evolved to conceptualize and promote a pathway to CHW certification that did not undermine the value of certification and met the rapidly evolving needs of non-white, non-English speaking communities in Greater Minnesota.

Purpose

The goals of the SCPHD pilot project were:

Initial

- 1) Evaluate the value and efficiency of public health department-based CHWs;

Later in project trajectory:

- 2) Strategize a solution to a problematic cycle of not being able to hire a non-certified CHW, while not having an avenue to support the CHW certification process of a non-employee;
- 3) Consider the CHW/PHN dyad model as a best practice in supervising a non-certified county-based CHW while they are concurrently providing essential services and pursuing certification;

- 4) Develop a sustainable financial model of medical assistance reimbursement for services provided by non-certified CHWs to promote the feasibility and sustainability of the model;
- 5) Contribute to the national conversation focused on the certified CHW pipeline, particularly those certified CHWs who originate from and serve refugee, immigrant, and migrant communities

Setting

The Steele County Public Health Department Based CHW/PHN dyad (SCPHD) was implemented March 2021 - September 2021, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The dyads provided linguistically concordant in-home COVID-19 vaccination, education, and co-occurring services and referrals in partnership with the Somali communities.

Implementation

Through the [National Resource Center for Refugees, Immigrants, and Migrants](#) (NRC-RIM) funding, Steele County Public Health and CHW Solutions partnered to design the SCPHD pilot and develop necessary protocols, standing provider order sets, health education templates, and procedures to support the PHN/CHW dyads. Dyads in the pilot consisted of Steele County public health nurses and [HealthFinders Collaborative](#) CHWs. The primary objective of the pilot activities was to deliver COVID-19 vaccines and education to Somali residents of Owatonna. The dyads visited two apartment complexes, selected through a three-pronged data-informed sampling strategy including COVID-19 case rates, essential services requests, and known geographic distribution of Somali community members. The dyads did not schedule appointments, but rather visited residents door-to-door. Based on the vaccine-type delivered, the dyads would automatically schedule return dates to the complexes at the appropriate timing to deliver the second doses. Anecdotally, vaccine uptake was high, and this was attributed to the presence of the CHW. CHWs shared personal experiences around receiving the vaccine and were able address questions and concerns through linguistically and culturally concordant perspectives. Co-occurring services were also offered at the vaccination encounters, including providing information about Child and Teen Checkup, car seat education, and WIC referrals. Role and scope delineation of the project were refined over the course of the pilot.

Based on observed outcomes, at the conclusion of the pilot, Steele County decided to pursue hiring county-based CHWs. Plans were halted when the County recognized that the pilot

Somali and Latinx CHWs were not certified, and therefore not eligible for service reimbursement through medical assistance (MA). This recognition highlighted that access to certified community health workers in this part of the state is extremely limited, particularly those that are linguistically and culturally concordant with communities served. Establishing a feasible and sustainable plan to recruit and certify CHWs originating from refugee, immigrant, and migrant communities is a key focus. Identifying an onboarding pathway for certified CHWs and establishing a reimbursement mechanism for non-certified CHWs as they are onboarded and certified are priority next steps. Steele County has targeted the expansion of the model to non-COVID work plans, including mobile, school-based health.

Partnership:

Pilot

[Technical Assistance] *CHW Solutions*: Provided CHW-focused technical assistance for the SCPHD initiative.

[Community Engagement] *Community-based Somali leaders*

[Human Resources] *HealthFinders Collaborative*: A county-based community health center that routinely uses community health workers to provide comprehensive access to health services for the systemically minoritized families of Rice and Steele Counties.

[Implementing Partner] *Steele County Public Health*

Ideal partnership formula (based on pilot experience)

Technical Assistance + Community + Human Resources + Implementing Partner + Funder

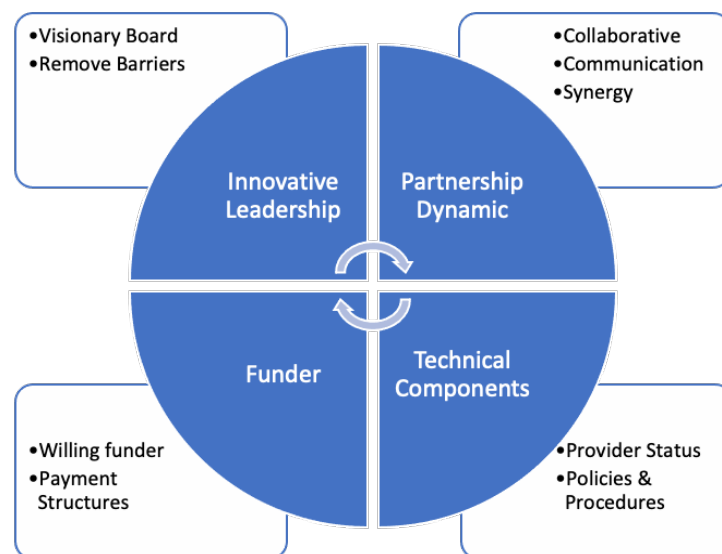
Potential additional partners in next steps:

[Funder] *South Country Health Alliance*: A county-based purchasing health plan serving 9 Minnesota counties—Brown, Dodge, Freeborn, Goodhue, Kanabec, Sibley, Steele, Wabasha, and Waseca. SCHA is the only medical assistance provider serving Steele County and supports the reimbursement for non-certified CHW services.

[Community based referral partners] Local clinics and hospitals

Evaluation

Steele County has achieved a full cycle of: service provision - billed for service - payment received, with an embedded certified CHW, and notes this as the threshold for long term success. Current activities involve the adaptation of this model to the non-certified CHW, specifically linguistically and culturally concordant CHWs originating from and serving refugee, immigrant, and migrant populations. Steele County identified the following dynamics as key elements for success:



Sustainability

Partners recognize regional synergy to create a comprehensive care team that bridges acute, primary, and public health, and is centered around the role of the CHW.