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STATE-ISSUED COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKER CERTIFICATE GUIDANCE LETTER July 1, 2023

PURPOSE

The purpose of this guidance letter is to provide details on the statewide requirements for the state-issued Certificate Programs for Community Health Workers, Promotoras(es) and Representatives (CHW/P/R). This letter outlines the requirements to receive a state-issued CHW/P/R Certificate and a Specialty Certificate, the requirements for renewing the CHW/P/R Certificate and the standards training programs must meet to be approved to train individuals to receive the state-issued CHW/P/R Certificate and a Specialty Certificate.

BACKGROUND

Pursuant to [Chapter 16.5 \(commencing with Section 18998\)](#)¹ of the Welfare and Institutions Code, the Department of Health Care Access and Information (HCAI) is required to determine and approve statewide requirements for certificate programs for community health workers. In collaboration with stakeholders, HCAI is tasked with developing a certificate that demonstrates the holder meets the requirements determined by the state to work as a CHW/P/R based on the holder's core competencies, experience, and skills. HCAI must determine the necessary curriculum to secure this certificate. HCAI must determine criteria for specialty certificate programs and specialized training requirements to secure a specialty certificate. In collaboration with stakeholders, HCAI is also charged with determining how prior experience as a community health worker may provide a pathway to certification, and how to verify prior experience.

In July 2022, the Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) implemented the [Community Health Worker Services Benefit](#)² providing the opportunity for preventative health services delivered by a CHW/P/R to be reimbursed through Medi-Cal, California's Medicaid program. CHW/P/R services are provided to prevent disease, disability, and other health conditions or their progression; to prolong life; and promote physical and mental health and efficiency. CHWs are trusted members of their community who help address chronic conditions, preventive health care needs, and health-related social needs. The state-issued CHW/P/R Certificate, outlined in this guidance letter, demonstrates that the holder has the core competencies to provide Medi-Cal reimbursable CHW services.

While the state-issued CHW/P/R Certificate is a pathway to have CHW/P/R services reimbursed through Medi-Cal, the Certificate is *NOT* required to work as a CHW/P/R in the state of California. Additionally, while there is an age requirement of 16 years old to receive a state-issued CHW/P/R Certificate, individuals must be at least 18 years old to be eligible to bill Medi-Cal.

The HCAI state-issued CHW/P/R Certificate will be available in early 2024. CHW/P/R services are available under Medi-Cal in both the fee-for-service (FFS) and managed care delivery systems. Under the Medi-Cal FFS delivery system, please reference page 8 of the DHCS [Medi-Cal Provider Manual on the CHW Preventive Services](#)⁴ and for Medi-Cal managed care requirements, please see information contained in Medi-Cal [All Plan Letter 22-016](#)². HCAI is working closely with DHCS to align pathways and eventually consolidate into one state certificate process for CHW/P/Rs. Please note that until such consolidations occur, these pathways are compliant with Medi-Cal policy.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

HCAI consulted with CHW/P/R stakeholders to gather input on how to implement a certificate program for CHW/P/Rs. HCAI conducted 43 stakeholder sessions with a total attendance of 1,573 across all sessions. HCAI developed the certificate model through three iterative models in response to stakeholder feedback. HCAI shared each certificate model iteration in draft form during information sessions and solicited suggestions for improvement. HCAI conducted sessions in Spanish and offered Spanish language translation services during English sessions. Written feedback from stakeholders was also encouraged, and HCAI received written comments in both English and Spanish. HCAI offered to provide translation and interpretation services in other languages upon request.

HCAI's stakeholder engagement process included:

- A series of one-on-one hour-long interviews with 41 stakeholders representing 26 organizations across California that play a significant role in the CHW/P/R field.
- 43 stakeholder sessions with a total attendance of 1,573:
 - 29 online listening sessions included Spanish sessions, Tribal partner sessions, and English and Spanish sessions specifically designed for active CHW/P/Rs.
 - Seven online information sessions: Six offered with simultaneous Spanish translation, and one session completed in Spanish.
 - Seven in-person listening sessions in Stockton, Salinas, Eureka, San Diego, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, and Oakland to accommodate stakeholders, particularly active CHW/P/Rs, who were unable to join virtual meetings.

DEFINITIONS

Community Health Worker: means a liaison, link, or intermediary between health and social services and the community to facilitate access to services and to improve the access and cultural competence of service delivery. A community health worker is a frontline health worker either trusted by, or who has a close understanding of, the community served. Community health workers include Promotoras/es, Promotoras/es de Salud, Community Health Representatives, navigators, and other non-licensed health workers with the qualifications developed and outlined in this chapter. A community health worker's lived experience shall align with and provide a connection to the community being served.

Certificate: A state-issued CHW/P/R Certificate shows an individual has successfully completed a training program approved by HCAI that teaches core competencies, experience and skills inherent to the roles of a CHW/P/R or an individual has demonstrated through their past work or volunteer experience that they already possess the core competencies, experience and skills as a CHW/P/R. The Certificate may be used to receive reimbursement for relevant CHW services provided to Medi-Cal members. CHW services, as [defined by DHCS](#)³, are preventive health

services to prevent disease, disability, and other health conditions or their progression; to prolong life; and promote physical and mental health.

Core Competencies: means the foundational and essential knowledge, skills, and abilities required for CHW/P/Rs. The specific competencies required to receive a certificate are outlined in the skills and roles table located under [Skills and Roles Necessary for the State-Issued CHW/P/R Certificate](#).

Medi-Cal: is California's Medicaid program. This is a public health insurance program which provides needed health care services for low-income individuals.

Self-Attestation: an official verification of something as true or authentic by the individual without the help of an outside party. For the Certificate, a self-attestation is an individual self-verifying a statement without the need for another individual to sign off on the accuracy of the statement and without submitting documentation. The CHW/P/R will attest during the application process that they will provide CHW/P/R services with individuals, communities, or populations that align with their lived experience.

Lived Experience: an individual's history that aligns with and provides a connection between the CHW/P/R and the community or population being served. This may include, but is not limited to, lived experience related to incarceration, military service, pregnancy and birth, disability, foster system placement, homelessness, mental health conditions or substance use, or being a survivor of domestic or intimate partner violence or abuse and exploitation. Lived experience may also include shared race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, language, or cultural background of one or more linguistic, cultural, or other groups in the community for which the CHW/P/R is providing services.

Specialty Certificate: a state-issued certificate that indicates the holder has additional training beyond the core competencies expected of a CHW/P/R that concentrates on specific program focus areas, with learning objectives and topics tailored to the skills required for distinct program areas and/or population needs.

HCAI Certification Website: HCAI will have a website, starting early 2024, that will contain the information necessary to obtain and renew CHW/P/R certificates. The website will also display the list of HCAI-approved CHW/P/R training programs.

REQUIREMENTS TO OBTAIN A STATE-ISSUED CHW/P/R CERTIFICATE

There are two pathways to obtaining a state-issued CHW/P/R Certificate: The Training Pathway and the CHW/P/R Experience Pathway. Both pathways ensure that individuals have or gain the core competencies outlined below. CHW/P/R stakeholders expressed their strong support for the adoption of the nationally recognized [Community Health Worker Core Consensus Project \(C3\)⁵](#) to outline skills for curriculum development necessary to receive the state-issued CHW/P/R Certificate. An individual must be at least 16 years of age to obtain a certificate. A certificate holder must be 18 years of age for Medi-Cal reimbursement.

Skills and Roles Necessary for the State-Issued CHW/P/R Certificate

To receive a state-issued CHW/P/R Certificate, an individual must demonstrate they possess the following CHW/P/R Core Competencies. For summary level information on each skill and role, review [C3 Project CHW Roles and Competencies Review Checklist⁶](#).

Core CHW Skills <i>Skills are defined as abilities.</i>	Core CHW Roles <i>Roles are defined as expectations of behavior.</i>
Communication Skills	Cultural Mediation Among Individuals, Communities, and Health & Social Service Systems
Interpersonal and Relationship-Building Skills	Providing Culturally Appropriate Health Education and Information
Service Coordination and Navigation Skills	Care Coordination, Case Management, and System Navigation
Capacity Building Skills	Providing Coaching and Social Support
Advocacy Skills	Advocating for Individuals and Communities
Education and Facilitation Skills	Building Individual and Community Capacity
Individual and Community Assessment Skills	Providing Direct Service
Outreach Skills	Implementing Individual and Community Assessments
Professional Skills and Conduct	Conducting Outreach
Evaluation and Research Skills	Participating in Evaluation and Research
Knowledge Base of Public Health Principles and Social Determinants of Health	

An individual can demonstrate they possess the core competencies to receive a state-issued CHW/P/R Certificate using either of the following pathways.

State-Issued Certificate Pathways

There are multiple pathways to obtain a state-issued CHW/P/R Certificate for new, current, and future CHW/P/Rs. The CHW/P/R Experience Pathway is designed for current CHW/P/Rs to receive a certificate through proof of their experience working as a CHW/P/R. For individuals without this work experience, the Training Pathway is designed for new and future CHW/P/Rs and requires individuals to complete a state-approved training program to obtain a CHW/P/R Certificate.

CHW/P/R EXPERIENCE PATHWAY

The CHW/P/R Experience Pathway (Experience Pathway) allows those who are currently working, or have experience, as a CHW/P/R to obtain a state-issued CHW/P/R Certificate based on this past work experience. HCAI anticipates closing the Experience Pathway in June 2029, but HCAI will revisit this based on Experience Pathway application volume as this date approaches.

This pathway can lead to a certificate in one of three ways, described in detail below,
Option 1 - Verification of Skills/Core Competencies and Past Work Experience

An individual that has worked or volunteered as a CHW/P/R must meet all of the following requirements:

1. [Self-Attestation](#) of lived experience.

2. Documented Hours
 - a. Applicants must have 2000 hours of prior work experience (employment or volunteering) in the past three years
 - b. At least 500 of these hours must be verified by an employer or an organizational representative where the applicant volunteered.
3. Verification of Core Competencies
 - a. A supervisor or organization official of the CHW/P/R employee or volunteer applicant must attest to the applicant having the [core competencies](#).

Option 2 - Prior completion of an HCAI-approved training program

To obtain a state-issued CHW/P/R Certificate under this option, an individual must meet the following requirements:

1. [Self-Attestation](#) of lived experience
2. Submit a certificate of completion from an HCAI-approved CHW/P/R training program demonstrating that they have completed a training to work as a CHW/P/R.
 - a. The certificate of completion must have been issued no earlier than five years from the application date and the certificate of completion must be from a time before the training program received the HCAI approval.
3. Submit proof of completing at least 10 hours of field experience (supervised CHW/P/R work in the field).

Options 1 and 2 of the CHW/P/R Experience Pathway will be available until June 30, 2029. As this date approaches, HCAI anticipates revisiting the application volume and deciding whether to close or maintain these options beyond this date. Option 3 of the CHW/P/R Experience Pathway, the Reciprocity option, will continue beyond 2029.

Option 3 - Reciprocity

To obtain a state-issued CHW/P/R Certificate under this option, an individual with a CHW/P/R certificate from another state or country must meet the following requirements:

1. [Self-Attestation](#) of lived experience
2. Submit a certificate of completion from a CHW/P/R training program from another state or country demonstrating that they have completed a training to work as a CHW/P/R
 - a. The certificate of completion must have been issued no earlier than five years from the application date.
3. Submit proof of completing at least 10 hours of field experience (supervised CHW/P/R work in the field).

HCAI, at its discretion, will review information (including, but not limited to, personal statements, testimonials and evidence of CHW/P/R work performed) submitted by an existing CHW/P/R that cannot meet the requirements for the options outlined above for reasons beyond their control. At its discretion, HCAI will consider whether to award a state-issued CHW/P/R Certificate to the

individual based on their unique circumstances and the information they offer to demonstrate they possess the core competencies outlined above to work as a CHW/P/R.

TRAINING PATHWAY

The Training Pathway is intended for individuals with limited or no experience working as a CHW/P/R. This pathway outlines the state requirements for individuals to gain the necessary knowledge and skills to provide CHW/P/R services and receive a state-issued CHW/P/R Certificate.

To obtain a state-issued CHW/P/R Certificate under the Training Pathway, an individual must meet the following requirements:

1. [Self-Attestation](#) of lived experience
2. Training program completion
 - a. An applicant must successfully complete an HCAI-approved CHW/P/R training program.
3. Field experience
 - a. Complete a minimum of 10 hours of field experience. The applicant may complete their field experience as part of their [HCAI-approved training program](#), or through their employer. Field experience hours may be unpaid, unless provided by the CHW/P/R current employer.

RENEWING THE STATE-ISSUED CHW/P/R CERTIFICATE

Renewal of the state-issued CHW/P/R Certificate ensures that the CHW/P/R workforce remains up to date on standards and receives updates on relevant policies or knowledge pertaining to CHW/P/R services. Renewal requirements allow the state to verify that CHW/P/Rs complete the required six hours annually of continuing education, required to continue providing Medi-Cal reimbursable CHW services.

CHW/P/Rs must renew their state-issued CHW/P/R Certificate once every two years by providing proof of completing a minimum of six hours each year (twelve hours total) of continuing education training from an HCAI-approved CHW/P/R training program. The applicant can show proof of completion of a training for a state-issued Specialty Certificate, discussed in more detail below, to meet six hours of the annual continuing education requirement.

For continuing education training courses and/or activities to meet state requirements, the education topics must focus on CHW/P/R [core competencies](#)), updates on applicable Medi-Cal laws, or CHW/P/R evidence-based/community-defined best practices.

The CHW/P/R can complete continuing education with an HCAI-approved CHW/P/R training program or with an employer. If the employer provides the continuing education, the employer must complete the verification form, which the CHW/P/R must submit to receive the certification renewal.

STATE-ISSUED SPECIALTY CERTIFICATE REQUIREMENTS

State-issued Specialty Certificates are *optional* additions to the general state-issued CHW/P/R Certificate. The Specialty Certificates have no impact on the ability of a CHW/P/R to secure reimbursement from Medi-Cal for CHW/P/R services. Specialty Certificates provide a CHW/P/R with an ability to demonstrate knowledge in a specialized field of work. A CHW/P/R may also use a state-issued Specialty Certificate to meet one year of the continuing education training for renewing the general state-issued CHW/P/R Certificate.

To obtain a state-issued Specialty Certificate, a CHW/P/R must meet the following requirements:

1. Possess a state-issued CHW/P/R Certificate.
2. Complete an HCAI-approved specialty training program.
 - a. Specialty trainings will be at least 10 hours of training with learning objectives and topics tailored to developing skills required for working on specific preventive health issues (e.g., preventive dental or mental health care), working with subgroups of marginalized communities (e.g., immigrants with substance use disorders or Alzheimer) and/or working in distinct program areas relevant to underserved communities (e.g., climate change or violence prevention).
 - b. HCAI-approved specialty trainings will be provided by, or in partnership with, HCAI-approved CHW/P/R Training Programs.

HCAI-APPROVED CHW/P/R TRAINING PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

No later than fall 2023, HCAI will release the process for programs to become an HCAI-approved CHW/P/R training program.

To be an HCAI-approved CHW/P/R training program, the training program must apply for approval. Programs must include the following:

1. Provide a minimum of 80 total hours of CHW/P/R training for each training cohort.
 - a. Model the curriculum after the [Community Health Worker Core Consensus Project \(C3\)](#)⁶ to teach the skills necessary for trainees to receive the state-issued CHW/P/R Certificate.
2. Include at least one former or current CHW/P/R on the training team.
 - a. CHW/P/R trainers must be actively involved with, and directly teaching CHW/P/R trainees. To secure approval, the training program will provide details on how the CHW/P/R trainer participates in the training program.
 - b. If a training program meaningfully integrates CHW/P/Rs into their CHW/P/R training program in another manner, training programs must detail this meaningful integration and HCAI will determine, at its discretion, whether the information is sufficient to approve the program.

3. Include a minimum of ten hours of field experience in the training curriculum.
 - a. The field experience hours are included in the minimum 80 hours of training. If the training program cannot teach all the core competencies to work as a CHW/P/R and conduct the field experience within the minimum 80-hour timeframe, the training program must increase the overall number of training hours.
4. Ensure each trainee takes a core competency assessment at the end of the training.
 - a. The assessment can be a test, supervised field experience, or other method of assessing that the trainee has gained the core competencies to be a CHW/P/R.
5. Provide support in the form of technical assistance for trainees to apply for the state-issued CHW/P/R Certificate.

CONTINUING EDUCATION TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

HCAI encourages HCAI-approved CHW/P/R training programs to offer CHW/P/R continuing education training.

- 1) CHW/P/R continuing education training must provide a minimum of six training hours with the education topics focused on [CHW/P/R core competencies](#), updates on applicable Medi-Cal policies, or CHW/P/R evidence-based/community-defined best practices.
- 2) Provide support for trainees to apply for the CHW/P/R certificate renewal.

HCAI-APPROVED SPECIALTY CERTIFICATE TRAINING PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

In 2024, HCAI will release the process for programs to become an HCAI-approved Specialty Certificate training program. To be an HCAI-approved Specialty Certificate training program, the training program must do the following:

1. Be an HCAI-approved CHW/P/R training program or partner with an HCAI-approved CHW/P/R Training Program to provide the Specialty Certificate training.
2. Submit an application to HCAI for approval of the Specialty Certificate

The Specialty Certificate training curriculum must meet the following requirements:

1. Provide a minimum of 10 hours of training in the specialized area.
2. Attest that the Specialty Certificate training curriculum is appropriate for training CHW/P/Rs.
3. Provide training with learning objectives and topics tailored to developing skills in any of the following general areas:
 - a. Preventive health issues (e.g., preventive dental or mental health care);

- b. Working with subgroups of marginalized communities (e.g., immigrants with substance use disorders or with Alzheimer's); and/or
 - c. Working in distinct program areas relevant to underserved communities (e.g., climate change or violence prevention).
4. Receive approval from experts within the specialized field. Experts, include but are not limited to, state and local governmental entities that oversee the specialized area, health provider associations providing care in the specialty area, community-based organizations with a mission to promote or advance the specialized area.
5. Provide support for trainees to apply for the Specialty CHW/P/R Certificate.

The training program may provide specialty training as part of an HCAI-approved CHW/P/R Certificate training program. An individual will receive a state-issued CHW/P/R Certificate and a Specialty Certificate if they complete a training for both certificates.

An HCAI-approved training program that incorporates both the CHW/P/R Certificate training and the Specialty Certificate training must offer a minimum of ten hours additional training beyond the required minimum 80 hours for the state-issued CHW/P/R Certificate.

HCAI may delegate its authority to approve Specialty Certificate training programs to other state departments under the Health and Human Services Agency for specializations within the other state department's area of expertise. The department(s) will ensure all requirements for a HCAI-approved Specialty Certificate training program are met.

APPENDIX

- 1 [Chapter 16.5 CHW Statute](#)
- 2 [DHCS, Medi-Cal All Plan Letter 22-016](#)
- 3 [DHCS, SPA 22-0001 Approval \(ca.gov\)](#)
- 4 [DHCS, Medi-Cal Provider Manual for the community health worker](#)
- 5 [Roles & Competencies | CHW Core Consensus Project \(c3project.org\)](#)
- 6 [C3 Project, Core Competencies & Final Report](#)