



CHI St. Alexius Health
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March 6, 2023

Chairperson Judy Lee
Human Services Committee
North Dakota State Capitol
Bismarck, North Dakota 58505

RE: HB1028 - Relating to the regulation of community health workers; to provide for a community health worker task force; to provide a statement of legislative intent; to provide for a report to the legislative assembly; and to provide an appropriation.

Good afternoon Chairperson Lee,

My name is Allison Wanner and I am a Community Health Worker with CHI St. Alexius Health Dickinson Medical Center, part of the CHI Health Midwest regional health network. CHI St. Alexius Health, formed in April 2016, is the largest healthcare delivery system in central and western North Dakota. The system comprises a tertiary hospital in Bismarck and critical access hospitals in Carrington, Devils Lake, Dickinson, Garrison, Turtle Lake, and Williston, along with numerous clinics and outpatient services throughout the region.

Thank you for the opportunity to express my support for HB1028 and the development of a state Community Health Worker (CHW) certification program. This will support and hopefully accelerate our state's investment in this crucial healthcare workforce, particularly at a time when innovative care models are needed to buffer the impacts of a sustained healthcare workforce shortage, while also positioning our health systems to comply with increasing accountabilities to provide comprehensive, whole- person care. At present, 21 states either operate a CHW certification program or contract with a third party for quality control and assurance of this critical workforce.¹ I am currently attending the Morehouse School of Medicine's online Community Health Worker program, with a goal to be fully certified by January 2024. The core competencies of the program are: *introduction to community health work, communication and ethics, health and health disparities, care management and coordination, community engagement and supports.*

Within CHI Health, we have been piloting clinical care models that leverage CHWs to address patients' health- related social needs and evaluating CHWs across the Midwest for several years and are happy to share our experience as you consider forming a CHW task force and creating a certification program.

¹ Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO). *State Approaches to Community Health Worker Certification*. 6.14.22

In the health care delivery model, a CHW supports providers through an integrated care management approach. The CHW helps patients navigate and access community services and other resources identified through screening for basic human needs, such as food, medication assistance, and housing. The CHW also provides education, social support, and advocates for the health needs of individuals and their communities. Community Health Workers monitor their patient's progress through regular patient contact and track the patient's progress in their documentation. Interventions, such as referrals to a food pantry or assistance with applying for SNAP benefits, are also tracked, which allows us to more readily identify community resource gaps. In the future, we hope this aggregate data about community resource gaps will inform community partnerships and mobilize action to close persistent gaps, such as affordable housing.

The following patient story illustrates how Community Health Workers make a difference in the lives of their patients:

A three year old child was seen by a clinic provider complaining of ear pain. Due to our newly implemented Social Determinants of Health (SDoH) screener, filled out by mom during registration, the provider noted that many areas of the families basic needs were not being met. The family, which consisted of a young single mother and her four children, were living at the local domestic violence shelter, after leaving a dangerous domestic situation in California. With the help of a Community Health Worker, the mother was streamlined through the Social Services system where she was quickly approved for Medicaid, SNAP, ND Rent Help and Child Care Assistance. The client is now living in a townhome and has been able to secure employment.

Between January- March 2023, ninety-two patients screened positive for health-related social needs at one of our CHI St. Alexius care sites in Dickinson. This included patients who reside in Stark, Dunn, Adams, Mercer, Hettinger, McKenzie, and Bowman counties. Twelve patients received assistance with housing, ten patients received assistance with food insecurity, and five received assistance with financial needs and transportation. Others received assistance with dental care, eye care, reading, safe living conditions, childcare, and medications.

A significant number of patients receiving assistance with health-related social needs are either uninsured or receive insurance through Medicaid. One quarter of patients who screened positive for social needs in January and February 2023 identified as being insured through Medicaid (26%) and ten identified that they are uninsured.

CHI St. Alexius' vision is a "healthier future for all, inspired by faith, driven by innovation, and powered by our humanity." We believe that the development of a robust Community Health Worker program in the state of North Dakota will pave the way to a healthier future for all. Thank you for considering this bill and to the Human Services committee for your interest in this issue.

I welcome any questions from the committee and would be happy to inform the CHW task force.

Thank you,

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