



Community Health Workers in Connecticut

2024

What is a community health worker?

Patient navigators. Outreach workers. Health coaches. These are a few of the roles filled by community health workers – frontline health workers who can play a critical role in improving health.

Their expertise is in the communities they serve. Most of what affects people's health happens outside the doctor's office, and community health workers are well-positioned to make sure medical care is most effective.

What do community health workers do?

Community health workers build relationships with patients that allow them to address their needs in a holistic way. For example:

- While a doctor might prescribe an inhaler to a patient with asthma, a community health worker could make sure the patient can afford to fill the prescription and get to the pharmacy during business hours and examine the patient's home for asthma triggers.
- A community health worker might find out that a patient is homeless and work with him on ways to manage his health conditions without having a place to cook or store medication – as well as helping him to find housing and other resources.

Why do community health workers matter?

Research shows community health workers can [improve health outcomes](#) and [save money](#) for the health care system by ensuring people get the right care. They are especially effective in reaching people who are not well served by the health care system.

Community health workers can also help to reduce the effects of workforce shortages by providing in-depth support for patients who need it. These roles also provide entry-level professional jobs for people who may face challenges entering the professional workforce.



What else should I know?

There are hundreds of community health workers serving people across Connecticut, but most are funded through short-term sources, such as grants, rather than more sustainable funding through the health care system. This means that even effective programs often end if grant funding goes away.

A [state law](#) passed in 2023 requires Connecticut’s Medicaid program to pay for community health worker services – something [24 other states already do](#). However, funding has not yet been appropriated to allow this payment to be implemented.

What other roles are similar to community health workers?

Doulas, peer support specialists, and recovery coaches are similar roles that prioritize building trusting relationships with patients through shared experiences or communities.

Overview of health support roles in Connecticut

| Role | What do they do? | Does CT Medicaid pay for services? | How many state Medicaid programs pay for services? |
|---|--|--|--|
| Community Health Worker | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connect people to culturally appropriate health and social services Help people manage their own health conditions | Not yet; DSS is developing a plan for payment | 24 |
| Doula | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support pregnant people and their families before, during and after childbirth | Payment expected to begin in 2025 through maternity bundle | 10 |
| Recovery Coach for Substance Use Disorder | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage people with substance use disorder (SUD) Help people with SUD to take steps toward harm reduction and recovery | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yes, in some inpatient and residential programs No, for outpatient services | 34 |
| Peer Support for Mental Health | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Give and receive assistance to achieve long-term recovery from mental illness | Yes, but limited to one targeted program | 36 |

How can I learn more?

Read: **Guide:** [CT Health’s topic guide on community health workers](#)
Policy brief: [Building health through relationships: Community health workers, doulas, recovery coaches, and peer support specialists](#)
Infographic: [A day in the life of a community health worker](#)
Report: [Understanding community health workers: Who they are and why they matter for CT](#)

Talk to:

- [Connecticut Association for Community Action](#)
- [Community Health Workers Association of Connecticut](#)
- [Community Health Center Association of Connecticut](#)
- [Southwestern AHEC](#)