

Creating Policy Supporting Use of Community Health Workers to Bridge the Gap in Diabetes Care in New Mexico

Public Health Issue

- Health departments have “played a smaller role in policy development than they should have” according to a recent Institutes of Medicine report. Policy development “requires cultivating skills...as well as developing and implementing strategies.”¹
- Health departments can provide fewer direct services in order to focus on systems and policy change with partners for greater population health improvement.¹

Program

- The New Mexico Department of Health Diabetes Prevention and Control Program (DPCP) invited the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors Policy State Technical Assistance Team (PSTAT) to provide technical assistance, training and skill development for addressing chronic disease policy issues.
- A pre-PSTAT process helped the state identify policy priorities. The focus of the PSTAT training and technical assistance was one of these policy options – assuring the use of Community Health Workers (CHW) as part of the health care team.

Impact

- The PSTAT process was instrumental in getting participants to reach vital consensus on the need for a state CHW certification credential as a first step in achieving inclusion of CHWs as a regular part of the health care team for people with diabetes.
- CHW credentialing, supported by the New Mexico Medicaid Program as a result of this policy process, provides a way to reimburse for these important services, making them more likely to be delivered.
- A desired outcome, meeting with DOH Secretary Catherine Torres, M.D. to discuss Priority Policy and PSTAT action plans did not occur as the Secretary left her position and a meeting with the current interim DOH Secretary is yet to occur. Processes for securing support of DOH leadership, as well as relying so heavily on a strategy of this nature, will be re-evaluated.
- The opportunity to introduce state legislation will have to wait until 2014. One internal change may turn out to be a positive move in securing more recognition for the effort with DOH leadership. The Office of Community Health Workers was relocated to the Office of Primary Care and Rural Health, a program that administers funds to federally qualified health centers and is a focal point for health professional workforce development. This move provides additional and important infrastructure and opportunities for inclusion in federal grants intended for increasing access to health care and enhancing the health care workforce.

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¹Institutes of Medicine, *For the Public's Health: Investing in a Healthier Future*, 2012.