

UnitedHealthcare Leveraging Community Health Workers

Project Description

UnitedHealthcare Community & State serves as a Medicaid Managed Care Organization in 26 states. In several markets, we have begun to leverage Community Health Workers (CHW) as an integral part of our health team. CHW focus on the members with the most complex needs who are also experiencing barriers in accessing to care. Members needs often include a combination of behavioral health, medical, and social supports.

The strategy behind the CHW approach is to increase engagement through access to a non-clinical resource that likely lives in the community and knows how to connect with the different cultures within the community. The CHW builds rapport and trust with members within the community while also emphasizing the importance of having a PCP relationship, helping members communicate effectively with their PCPs, making sure members have access to transportation and teaching them about appropriate use of the Emergency Department.

Over time UnitedHealthcare has come to recognize the importance of the role a CHW has in serving the Medicaid population. We are working to continually evolve this role and how these individuals can contribute to our efforts to achieve improved health outcomes, member experience, and improved efficiencies.

Project Partners

In addition to UnitedHealthcare staff, key players include community organizations who know where the members are and what community resources are available. Additionally, we work with national community health thought leaders to ensure our model maximizes the opportunities for our CHWs and members.

Project Significance and Impact

By offering this program to members with chronic and acute conditions, we are seeing significant increases in engagement. The CHW may accompany members to a PCP appointment and assist them with finding resources in their community to support management of their chronic conditions. Members have commented before they were enrolled in the program they only went to the clinic when they needed a prescription refill. They also said it means a lot to them to know someone is looking out for them. They schedule and attend doctor appointments more frequently and get attention for their acute care in a more timely manner.

This project has allowed UHC to augment the traditional health care workforce with “nontraditional workers” while improving member engagement. CHWs work within their assigned scope of responsibilities and do so in collaboration with licensed health professionals. This arrangement allows licensed staff to work to the top of their licensure. Additionally, because of the CHWs’ connections to the communities they service, UHC is better able to meet members where they are in their personal health journey. As we look to address many of the social determinants of health and deliver services in a culturally competent way, the CHW will play a critical role.

Additional Information and Project Contacts

For more information, please contact Tracey Davidson, CEO UnitedHealthcare Community Plan of Ohio, Inc. Tracy.L.Davidson@uhc.com or 614.410.7474.