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## **News Release**

### **Community Health Workers Fly Under the Radar to Fill a Critical Role in Healthcare**

(Salt Lake City, UT) – You may know them as a health advisor, advocate, promotora, or even a health navigator, but what all Community Health Workers (CHWs) have in common is the trust of the people they serve. CHWs are skilled laypeople who share similar life circumstances or shared cultures with their clients. They act as a liaison between their community and health and social services, assisting and educating the people they serve to live the healthiest lives possible.

You'll find these talented, caring individuals in a variety of settings and positions throughout Utah working as paid staff or volunteers. Whether it's helping at-risk pregnant women, aging seniors, or recovering addicts, the goal is helping individuals deal with and overcome their own health challenges.

"Patients struggle to access healthcare because of language barriers, cultural issues, or financial challenges," said Anna Guymon, Community Health Worker Specialist with the Utah Department of Health. "Often these challenges are concentrated in low-income communities. Since, CHWs come from similar neighborhoods, speak the same language, and share the culture, they are able to connect with these patients on a level others in healthcare can't."

Many partners have come together to create a coalition to provide CHWs with training, and additional resources. "Intermountain is excited to support this effort," said Jessica Strong, CHW Project Consultant for Intermountain Healthcare. Intermountain will

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provide \$1.2 million over the next three years to these efforts. “As a not-for-profit healthcare system, Intermountain Healthcare’s priority is to improve health in the communities we serve, and know that building partnerships and developing resources such as the CHW project will go a long way towards that goal.”

### **What makes CHWs so valuable?**

- CHWs can help reduce the overall cost of healthcare in Utah by emphasizing prevention and teaching the proper use of healthcare services.
- Studies show that programs utilizing CHWs have improved patient health behaviors and outcomes such as greater patient health knowledge.
- CHWs assist traditionally underserved individuals to receive proper healthcare. Healthcare providers can benefit from the skills, community knowledge, and cultural literacy CHWs offer which can help them to connect better with their patients.

In an effort to better organize and prepare CHWs for the future healthcare needs of the state, a pre-conference session focused on CHWs will be held as part of the Utah Public Health Association's annual conference on Monday, April 11 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Sheraton Hotel in Salt Lake City. For more information visit [www.upha.org](http://www.upha.org).

For more information on CHWs in Utah, visit <http://ow.ly/100Bqt>.

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*The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public's health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death, assuring access to affordable, quality health care, and promoting healthy lifestyles.*