

# Alliance for a Healthy New England

## HEALTH NOW! MASSACHUSETTS

### **HEALTH NOW! SUPPORTS COMMUNITY OUTREACH EFFORTS**

#### **How will *Health Now!* improve public health, prevent disease, and increase access to health care and community outreach efforts ?**

The *Health Now!* bill dedicates \$10 million to support and expand Community Health Worker (CHW) outreach programs, which provide community-based education, health promotion, health insurance enrollment, and referral activities. The *Health Now!* bill will enable the MA Department of Public Health (DPH), with CHW input, to develop a comprehensive planning process to assess the need statewide for CHW services, provide training coordination, enhance existing CHW programs, and develop new CHW programs as needed. Work with the MA Department of Medical Assistance (DMA) will help create a mechanism to include CHW services in Medicaid reimbursement rates.

#### **Who are Community Health Workers and why are they so important in increasing access to care in many communities?**

Community Health Worker (CHW) is a term used nationally to describe and unify outreach educators, health educators, health advisors, and health promoters. They are trusted peers of community members who promote healthy living by educating about disease and injury prevention/intervention/treatment, and who assist community members in better understanding and accessing health and human services systems. They are advisors who provide health education, assess the community's health needs and link them to appropriate resources. CHWs are critical in minority, immigrant, or rural communities where services provided by physicians, nurses, and clinical facilities may be limited or where access to and understanding of the health care system may also be limited. In many communities, CHWs are the gateway to care and a consistent link to services.

#### **Community Health Workers:**

- Increase health insurance enrollment and appropriate utilization of health care through community based peer outreach strategies.
- Address the disparities in quality health care among racial and ethnic minorities in the Commonwealth by increasing utilization of preventive services, heightening awareness of health risks, and connecting people to appropriate services.

- Improve the quality of care by facilitating communication, including cultural understanding between the patient and health care providers.
- Reduce the costs of health care by providing education and preventive services that promote health and prevent disease.

### **What have Community Health Workers accomplished thus far?**

The concept of Community Health Workers is not new. Community Health Workers have played a vital role in health care delivery. They have a greater likelihood of facilitating communication directly with patients and may be more sensitive to cultural issues. They also speak up for the needs and interests of the communities they serve. Through their efforts, Massachusetts has had one of the most successful track records of enrolling hard to reach populations in publicly funded health insurance programs. Their work has been most beneficial in communities that have traditionally lacked access to care.

### **Why does the Massachusetts Community Health Workers Network (MACHW) support the *Health Now!* bill?**

Members of MACHW, a statewide network of Community Health Workers, have been involved in all levels of the *Health Now!* initiative and urge you to join in this effort. By increasing the tobacco tax by \$0.50, the *Health Now!* bill will bring in over \$150 million in tobacco taxes and generate another \$120 million in federal matching funds to increase health access for people in our communities.

### **In addition to supporting community health outreach efforts, revenue from the *Health Now!* bill will fill the current gaps in health care:**

- Expand MassHealth to 19- and 20-year olds, low-income working adults who do not have children, and parents of insured children.
- Support the Free Care Pool system
- Provide new benefits for low income seniors

For More Information **please contact:**

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