

Madam Chair, Members of the Committee, my name is Carol Pace. I am a volunteer with AARP Colorado. AARP has over 670,000 members in Colorado and is focused on Coloradans age 50 and above, and their families.

AARP supports SB 23-002, Medicaid Reimbursement for Community Health Services

Colorado has nearly a third of its population 50 years and over. With increased health care needs, older adults with Medicaid coverage would benefit significantly from community health worker services.

As has been identified, 15 other states are successfully using similar programs. Analysis by KFF¹ describes community health workers as:

Frontline workers who have close relationships with the communities they serve, allowing them to better liaise and connect community members to health care systems. They often share life experiences, language, socioeconomic status, and race/ethnicity with members of the communities in which they work, allowing them to foster greater trust between community members and the health care system. . . As of May 2021, there were an estimated 61,010 CHWs working in the United States.

Older adults may benefit from services which may include care coordinators, health educators, patient navigators, and outreach and enrollment facilitators. Services may include culturally appropriate health promotion and education, assistance in accessing medical and non-medical services, translation services, care coordination, patient advocacy, home visits, and social support.

AARP research has shown that the majority of older adults prefer “aging in place.” Programs such as are promoted by SB23-002 may enhance the opportunities for Coloradans to do just that, to improve health outcomes, and to overall increase health care cost-effectiveness.

We ask that the committee support SB 23-002.

Respectfully,

Carol Pace, AARP Volunteer Advocate

¹ Sweta Haldar and Elizabeth Hinton, “State Policies for Expanding Medicaid Coverage of Community Health (CHW) Worker Services,” KFF (January 2023), <https://www.kff.org/medicaid/issue-brief/state-policies-for-expanding-medicare-coverage-of-community-health-worker-chw-services/> (2-22-23).



POLICY STATEMENT

Due to lived experience, community health workers who hold LGBTQ+ identities are able to provide culturally-relevant and identity-affirming care to members of the LGBTQ+ community in the areas of disease prevention and health promotion. By allowing community health workers to reimburse services through Medicaid or Medicare, they are better able to provide affordable mental health and transition-related service options to LGBTQ+ Coloradans.

SB23-002 promotes and incentivizes individuals with lived experiences to enter the community health work field, as well as seeks stakeholder input regarding training and skills-based requirements. Envision:You strongly supports Senate Bill 23-002 to ensure Medicaid Reimbursement for Community Health Services.

Senate Bill 23-002 Medicaid Reimbursement for Community Health Services

The proposed bill authorizes the Department of Health Care Policy and Financing to seek federal authorization from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid services to provide medicaid reimbursement for community health social work services. A community health social worker is defined as serving as a liaison between health-care providers or social service providers and community members in order to facilitate access to physical, mental, or dental health-related services, or services to combat social determinants of health, and who improves the quality and cultural competence of health-related service delivery. The bill also requires four public stakeholder meetings to solicit input on considerations to be included in the state department's request for federal authorization. The department must also include a report and presentation on how community health workers are being utilized through Medicaid to the joint budget committee at the "State Measurement for Accountable, Responsive, and Transparent (SMART) Government Act" hearing on or before January 31, 2026.

Why it Matters

Health First Colorado (Colorado's Medicaid Program) provides public health insurance for low-income individuals with monthly incomes under \$1,305 and families of four under \$2,688. According to Envision:You's State of the State Survey Report that surveyed over 500 LGBTQ+ Colorado residents, 15% of respondents utilized Medicaid for health insurance. According to One Colorado's 2018 report "Closing the Gap: The Turning Point for LGBTQ+ Health", 20% of transgender respondents are covered by Medicaid, which includes comprehensive

transition-related care. LGBTQ+ individuals continue to experience mental health concerns and substance use disorders at significantly higher rates than their non-LGBTQ+ counterparts. Community mental health workers who hold LGBTQ+ identities are able to provide care that is more culturally relevant due to their personal lived experiences, highlighting the need to expand the community health workforce. The positive impact of culturally relevant care in community health settings can be seen through the efforts of Community Heart Health Action for Latinos At-risk Program and the Colorado Heart Healthy Solutions program.

Community mental health workers are valuable, trusted, resources that help many Coloradans navigate social services and health care systems. Their role serves in preventing the onset or progression of disease, disability, and other health conditions as well as promoting physical, dental, and behavioral health. Participants in Envision: You's [State of the State Survey Report](#) noted that the amount of time and energy necessary to figure out insurance or Medicaid coverage, determine the kinds of care covered and associated costs, and to complete necessary paperwork are prohibitive of care seeking, particularly for those who are in crisis or immediate need. Research on community health worker interventions that address unmet social needs for historically marginalized populations found that every dollar invested in the intervention returns \$2.47 to an average medicaid payer within a fiscal year.

SB23-002 supports the work of community health workers and will expand access to care for many LGBTQ+ Coloradans who receive care through Medicaid or Medicare. The bill also outlines that public stakeholder meetings prior to federal authorization will seek input regarding the importance of training and skills-based experience requirements as minimum qualifications for community health workers, which satisfies requirements outlined in existing legislation HB22-1267 Culturally Relevant Training Health Professionals.

For these reasons, Envision:You strongly supports Senate Bill 23-002 for Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement for community health social work services.

Envision:You

Envision:You seeks to close gaps in behavioral health outcomes for LGBTQ+ individuals through co-created community programming, advocacy engagement, public awareness campaigns, and evidence-based training. To learn more please visit: www.envision-you.org.

For more information, please contact Steven Haden at steven.haden@envision-you.org.

Please Support SB23-002 Community Health Services

Onnastasia Cole, Young Invincibles

Thank you Senate Health and Human Services committee members for your time today. My name is Onnastasia Cole (pronouns she/her), and I am a Policy Advocate with Young Invincibles. I am here today to testify on behalf of Young Invincibles and young adults in our network to support SB23-002, Expand Access to Community Health Workers.

Every day, young adults in Colorado are struggling to navigate our complex healthcare system, making it difficult (if not impossible) to access needed prevention services, chronic disease management, and culturally responsive care. This not only negatively impacts long-term health outcomes but also mental health, which is a growing problem in our state.

This bill provides an opportunity to expand access to Community Health Workers (CHWs) for patients and community members across Colorado by enabling Medicaid reimbursement for some of the services CHWs provide, including connecting patients to community based-services that address social determinants of health. CHWs play a key role connecting young adults to needed services and achieving health equity in Colorado. The benefits of CHWs are well documented. For example:

- Evidence shows that CHWs can help improve healthcare access and outcomes, strengthen healthcare teams and enhance quality of life for people in low-income, underserved and diverse communities.
- Many interventions that integrate CHWs into health care delivery and public health systems are associated with reductions in chronic illnesses, better medication adherence, increased patient involvement, improvements in overall community health and reduced healthcare costs.
- Researchers in Pennsylvania found that Community Health Workers yielded Medicaid a return of \$2.47 for every dollar invested.

As we continue to grapple with the long-term impacts of COVID-19, it's more important than ever to ensure young adults have access to healthcare services while cutting unnecessary costs. I hope you will join Young Invincibles in supporting SB 23-002 so every young adult in Colorado has the support they need to thrive. Thank you.

**Testimony on Senate Bill 23-002
Medicaid Reimbursement for Community Health Services**

Cassie Littler, MD, FAAP

March 2, 2023

Madame Chair and Members of the Committee –

My name is Dr. Cassie Littler. I am a primary care community pediatrician currently practicing at a Federally Qualified Community Health Center in the metro Denver area, although I also spent almost twelve years as a community pediatrician serving children and families on the Western Slope in Grand Junction and Fruita. I am the current President of the Colorado Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and represent almost 800 pediatric providers across the state of Colorado.

On behalf of the Chapter and the children and families that we serve, I ask that you support SB23-002.

The AAP defines “Community Pediatrics” in a Policy Statement published exactly 10 years ago as the practice of promoting and integrating the positive social, cultural, and environmental influences on children’s health as well as addressing potential negative effects that deter optimal child health and development within a community. It includes the recognition that family, educational, social, cultural, spiritual, economic, environmental, and political forces affect the health and function of children. There is also a commitment to collaborate with community partners to advocate for and provide quality services equitably for ALL children within the community in which a pediatrician serves.

I and my pediatric colleagues across the state support this bill because we know that children and youth deserve comprehensive medical care with strong connections between their medical homes and the social support networks within their communities. Expanding access to Community Health Workers (CHWs) for children and their families is crucial to achieving health equity, improving health outcomes, and helps build workforce capacity to provide wrap-around services to children and youth.

In both my practice in Grand Junction and in my practice here in Denver, we are committed to upholding the framework of Community Pediatrics described above to provide timely, comprehensive whole-person pediatric care within the medical home. This includes working with CHWs and connecting families to these trusted team members to provide comprehensive care. For example, in Grand Junction we were fortunate to have received grant funding from

the State Innovation Model which also provided regional health connectors as well as funding for bilingual care navigators to support families in our community to increase access to timely care. Although these were incredible resources, as grants are completed and funding disappears, these resources and services were not sustainable in our community. This bill will help to create **SUSTAINABLE** funding and greatly increase capacity to provide much needed services and community connections to children and youth across the state.

Therefore, on behalf of the Colorado Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, I urge you to support passage of SB23-002.

Thank you!