Accredited Community Health Worker (CHW) Certification Training Programs: Three-year Spotlight

Lauryn Dunkwu

University of Maryland, College Park

The University of Maryland Strategic Partnership: MPowering the State

For

The Office of Population Health Improvement, Maryland Department of Health

August 2023

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Executive Summary

Background: Community Health Workers (CHWs) play an essential role in Maryland's healthcare, serving as a vital link between individuals and health and social services. The CHW certification training programs, accredited by the Maryland Department of Health, provide instruction based on the Maryland CHW core competencies and provide a supervised practicum for CHW students. The Maryland Community Health Worker Act of 2018 required regulations for the certification of CHWs and the accreditation of CHW certification training programs. This report provides an in-depth three-year analysis of the accredited CHW certification training programs, detailing their achievements, challenges, and future goals, drawing from extensive surveys and interviews.

Methodology: The "Accredited Community Health Worker (CHW) Certification Training Programs: Three-year Spotlight" (Spotlight) project is approved by the Maryland Department of Health Institutional Review Board (IRB). The 'Spotlight' employed an online survey of accredited CHW certification training programs and virtual interviews with training program staff and graduates. The survey delved into the specifics of training program delivery, its successes, challenges, and future goals. The interviews provided elaborate context to the survey findings. Out of the 17 CHW certification training program organizations, there was a strong 94.1% response rate. Analysis was carried out using Microsoft Excel and QGIS 3.32 Lima. This process enabled us to represent our findings through descriptive charts, maps, and thematic insights. For a more granular view of the training programs' geographical spread in Maryland, we turned to geospatial analysis. Additionally, the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey provided supplementary data to enrich our findings. A SWOT analysis was also crucial in pinpointing the strengths, opportunities, and threats surrounding CHW certification training program accreditation.

Survey and Interview Findings: A survey of the accredited CHW certification training programs revealed that 62.5% utilize a hybrid instructional approach, 31.2% are fully virtual, and only one (6.3%) is exclusively in-person. Grant-funded scholarships are predominant in nine (9) programs, while seven (7) programs require some students to self-finance their training. Geographically, the accredited CHW certification training programs are chiefly located in Central and Southern Maryland, with Montgomery county standing out for its Spanish language-only training. A vast majority of the accredited CHW certification training programs (75%), expressed interest in peer networking and digital resource sharing, suggesting platforms like webinars and shared Google Drives. The accredited CHW certification training programs have achieved significant milestones, notably enhancing students' employability and skill sets while garnering widespread positive feedback and establishing pivotal partnerships. Despite these successes, the programs faced challenges, including resource limitations. Embracing

innovations, such as virtual learning and community-centric practicums, has greatly benefited the curriculum. The programs have left a marked impact on communities through strategic collaborations and producing graduates who now serve as indispensable members of the community healthcare workforce. Looking ahead, the focus is on widening the training programs' reach, fortifying partnerships, expanding the curriculum, and ensuring sustained funding.

Strengths and Opportunities: The Department's CHW Program has garnered significant trust and satisfaction among the accredited CHW certification training organizations. As these programs passionately champion CHWs as indispensable to community health, this unique spotlight offers an understanding of the broader landscape, encompassing training needs and student accessibility. There is an opportunity to address and strategize around the concerns related to CHWs' long-term employment prospects, potentially enhancing retention rates in accredited CHW training programs. The inclusion of CHW services for reimbursements within health systems emerges as a key opportunity, encouraging employers to more readily embrace and invest in CHWs, thus strengthening their role and recognition.

Conclusion and Recommendations: From 2020 to 2023, Maryland's accredited CHW training programs have showcased the vital role of CHWs in healthcare. Since April 2020, 456 students who completed an accredited CHW training program have been certified, marking the program's efficacy. The study suggests establishing collaboration platforms for CHW stakeholders and evolving the curriculum based on real-time community insights. Addressing CHW job security and improving training accessibility are pivotal areas for future focus.

Introduction

Background

Community Health Workers (CHWs) are critical pillars in the healthcare sector, bridging the gap between individuals, communities, and health and social services. They are frontline public health workers who have an intimate understanding of the communities they serve, often sharing the same socioeconomic status, ethnicity, language, and lived experiences.[1,2] Their unique role enables them to provide culturally appropriate health education and information, facilitate access to healthcare services, and advocate for individuals and community health needs. By fostering trust and providing tailored health interventions, CHWs significantly contribute to reducing health disparities, enhancing health outcomes, and improving overall community health.

CHW training programs are designed to equip individuals with the knowledge, skills, and competencies required to serve their communities effectively. These programs often involve developing essential soft skills like communication, empathy, problem-solving, and leadership, in addition to a curriculum covering basic health knowledge, patient advocacy, care coordination, health education, social determinants of health, and cultural competency.[3] Focusing on practical, hands-on experience, these programs prepare CHWs to be effective intermediaries between health services and communities, enhancing access to services, improving the quality of care received, and ultimately fostering healthier communities.

The crucial role of CHWs in the state of Maryland was reinforced through the Maryland Community Health Worker Act, enacted in 2018 (Health-General Article §§ 13-3701-3709). This Act, coupled with regulations for CHW certification (COMAR 10.68.01) and training program accreditation (COMAR 10.68.02) adopted in 2019,[4] has bolstered the work of CHWs within the healthcare and social services systems across the state.

The Maryland Department of Health oversees the accreditation process for CHW certification training programs in accordance with the Code of Maryland Regulations 10.68.02. To gain accreditation, organizations submit applications through the Maryland OneStop portal, which are then reviewed by the CHW Training Program Review Committee. Successful training program organizations are accredited for three years.

The accredited certification training programs meet several requirements, including instruction and supervised practicum for students and incorporating the nine core competencies of Maryland CHWs in the program's curriculum framework.[3] These competencies are:

1. Advocacy and community capacity building skills

2. Effective oral and written communication skills
3. Cultural competency
4. Understanding of ethics and confidentiality issues
5. Knowledge of local resources and system navigation
6. Care coordination support skills
7. Teaching skills to promote health behavior change
8. Outreach methods and strategies
9. Understanding of public health concepts and health literacy

At the time of this "Spotlight," 17 training organizations representing 18 accredited CHW certification training programs have been accredited by the Department of Health, ensuring they meet the standards set forth by [COMAR 10.68.02](#).

Objectives

This project set out to create a detailed three-year spotlight on the accredited CHW certification training programs, highlighting their successes, challenges, and future aspirations, with the following objectives:

- Describe the successes, challenges, and future goals of Maryland's accredited CHW certification training programs
- Assess interest in participating in peer networking and resource sharing for accredited CHW certification training programs
- Develop a report to highlight the strengths and opportunities of a CHW certification training program accreditation process

This report is underpinned by data and information obtained through a survey distributed amongst the 17 accredited CHW training program organizations representing 18 CHW certification training programs, key informant interviews with both training program staff and graduated students, and an exploration into the training programs' interest in forming an informal peer network and resource sharing group.

Methodology

Survey Questionnaires

The study was guided by a Maryland Department of Health IRB-approved protocol, which was obtained prior to the start of data collection. The project utilized Google Forms to deploy an online survey to accredited CHW training programs and conducted virtual key informant interviews with accredited CHW training programs and their graduated CHW students using Google Meet. The survey for accredited CHW training programs included:
- General questions on how their training program is delivered
- Successes, challenges, and impact of their training program
- Interest in future collaborations with other accredited CHW training programs

Likewise, the key informant interviews included questions on:
- Staff interview
  - Success stories and challenges
  - Impact of their training program on students and communities
  - Future plans and opinions on improving CHW training programs
- Student interview
  - Motivations for participating in the training program
  - Maryland CHW certification process
  - Success stories and impact of training program on career goals
  - Recommendations for training programs

Data Collection

The data collection process for this study encompasses a mixed methods approach involving both quantitative and qualitative data collection, using a Google Form survey and in-depth interviews.
- Survey: The first data collection tool is a Google Form survey, sent to each of the 17 accredited CHW training program organizations representing 18 CHW certification training programs accredited by the Department of Health since January 2020.
- Interviews: Complementing the surveys, in-depth interviews were conducted to collect qualitative data. Qualitative data from the interviews were collected by hand, noting key details in interviewee responses. These interviews involved accredited CHW training program organizations and their graduated CHW students who consented to participate. The interviews were conducted virtually at a time chosen by the interviewee. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes for accredited CHW training program organizations and 10 minutes for graduated CHW students.

Sample

A total of 16 accredited CHW training program organizations representing 17 CHW certification training programs responded to the survey, a response rate of 94.1%. In addition, interviews were scheduled and conducted with 11 accredited CHW training program organizations and two (2) identified CHW students. All survey responses were included in the analysis.

Data Analysis

The responses collected through the survey were exported to Microsoft Excel for cleaning and management. The data was then analyzed in Microsoft Excel and QGIS 3.32 Lima for each applicable question, and the findings were represented in descriptive charts and maps, respectively. The qualitative information from the survey underwent thematic analysis, identifying emerging themes and information from the interviews was used to provide the context to the narrative.

Descriptive Analysis: Accessibility of the accredited CHW certification training programs was examined in a descriptive analysis to identify the types of formats the training programs were delivered in and the funding options the training programs had available to CHW students. Some accredited CHW certification training programs reported delivering their CHW training program in more than one of the format options (hybrid, virtual, in-person). These selections were recoded and analyzed as 'hybrid'. Similarly, some accredited CHW certification training programs identified multiple funding options which are available to students; a chart shows the number of accredited CHW certification training programs that have stated funding options available to students in their CHW certification training program. Interests in peer networking and digital resource sharing for accredited CHW certification training programs were also assessed using descriptive analysis.

Geospatial Analysis: Addresses of the accredited CHW certification training programs were obtained from the CHW Program office and used to create geocodes in QGIS, showing the locations of the training programs in maps outlining jurisdictions in the state. These maps were used to show the locations of accredited CHW certification training programs based on:

- Population distribution by jurisdiction;
- Median income by jurisdiction;
- Languages of instruction and distribution of non-English speaking populations by jurisdictions; and,
- Distribution of rural and non-rural jurisdictions.

There are twenty-four local jurisdictions in Maryland.[5] The rural jurisdictions include: Allegany County, Calvert County, Caroline County, Carroll County, Cecil County, Charles County, Dorchester County, Frederick County, Garrett County, Harford County, Kent County, Queen Anne's County, Somerset County, St. Mary's County, Talbot County, Washington County, Wicomico County, and Worcester County.

The urban jurisdictions include: Anne Arundel County, Baltimore City, Baltimore County, Howard County, Montgomery County, and Prince George's County.

Thematic Analysis: Qualitative data collected from the survey was analyzed using thematic analysis to identify emerging themes. This involved:
- Familiarization with the collected information by reading the content
- Generating initial codes
- Identifying themes that capture a central idea present in multiple codes
- Reviewing the themes to merge and split definitions as necessary
- Defining the themes by ensuring the names and descriptions accurately define the responses from the survey

SWOT Analysis: Findings from the analysis of data collected will be strategically analyzed to identify the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats of the CHW Training Program Accreditation, to guide development of recommendations to the CHW Program. The analysis will define the following:
- Strengths: Internal attributes and advantages of the accreditation of CHW certification training programs
- Weaknesses: Internal limitations or deficiencies in the accreditation of CHW certification training programs
- Opportunities: Insights and trends from accredited CHW certification training programs to leverage on in strengthening community health workforce development in Maryland
- Threats: External factors or trends that could pose challenges in the continued accreditation of CHW certification training programs.

Ad-Hoc Analysis

Other data on median income, population, and language other than English spoken at home in Maryland jurisdictions' was obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau's (USCB's) American Community Survey (ACS).[6] The U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) is an ongoing survey program that provides vital information on a yearly basis about America and its people, including detailed data on demographic, social, economic, and housing characteristics.[7] Data on the number of CHWs who have obtained certification was obtained from the CHW Program.

Limitations

The survey responses are representative of the 16 accredited CHW certification training program organizations' primary contact at the CHW Program. The Spotlight highlights the accreditation period of the training programs and does not collect any data from the CHW certification training program accreditation administrators.

Findings

Descriptions of the Accessibility of Accredited CHW Certification Training Programs

<u>Training Delivery Format</u>
The accredited CHW certification training programs were asked to identify the instruction formats their training programs are delivered in. Ten (62.5%) accredited CHW certification training programs offered the instructional components of their training in a blend of virtual and in-person formats (hybrid). Five (31.2%) of the accredited CHW certification training programs offered their instructional components virtually only, while one (1) accredited CHW certification training program offered the instructional components of their training in person only. Figure 1 below gives a visual representation of the availability of accredited CHW certification training programs in different delivery formats.
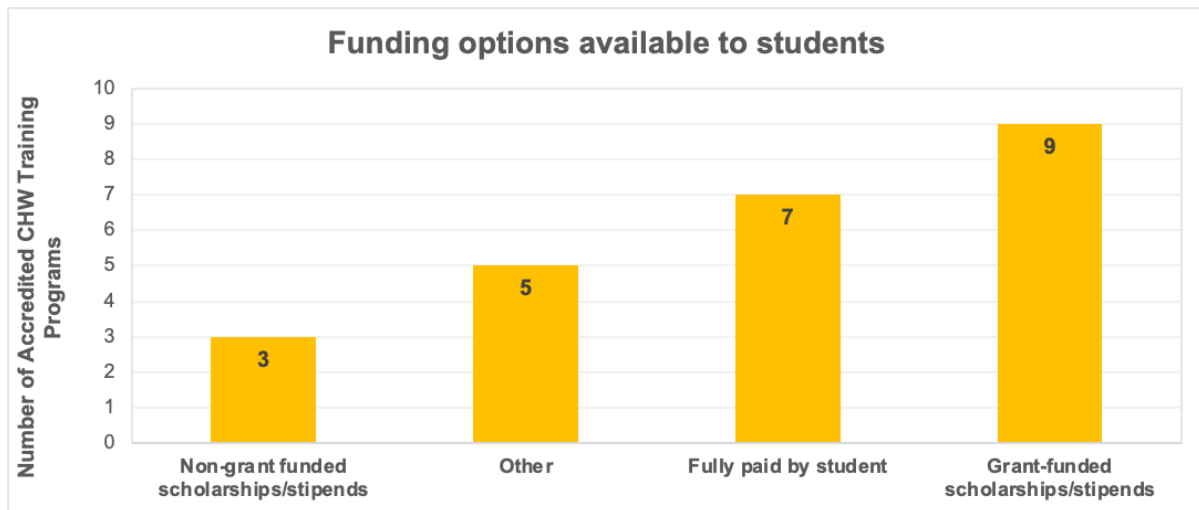
Figure 1: Accredited CHW certification training programs delivery formats
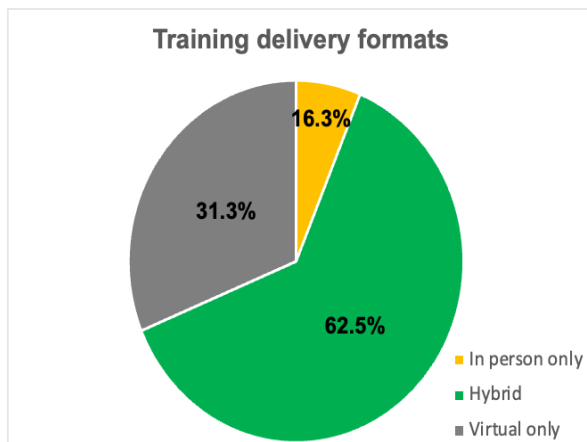
CHW Training Program Funding Options for Students

The accredited CHW certification training programs identified different funding options made available to students participating in the program. Nine (9) of the responding accredited CHW certification training programs offered grant-funded scholarship options to students, while three (3) programs offered non-grant-funded scholarship options. Seven (7) of the accredited CHW certification training programs reported that their training was fully paid for by students, usually when they did not meet the requirements to qualify for other funding options such as scholarships. Figure 2 below shows the number of accredited CHW certification training programs offering the four (4) different funding options identified in the survey.

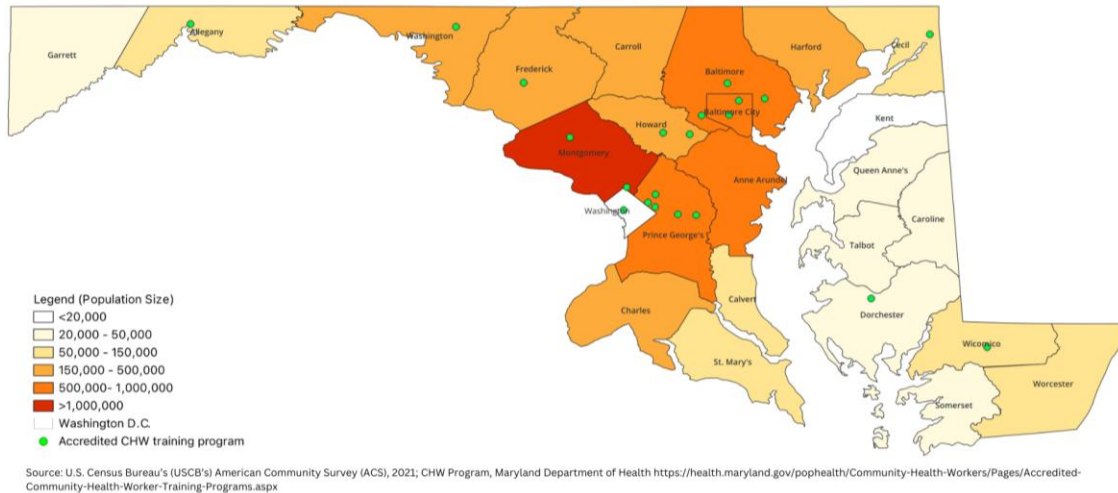**Figure 2**: Funding options available to students of the accredited CHW certification training programs

Geographic Distribution of Accredited CHW Certification Training Programs

Geographic Location of Accredited CHW Certification Training Programs by Population

The 18 accredited CHW certification training programs are located at 21 different locations across Maryland and Washington D.C. Figure 3 shows this distribution across Washington D.C and the 24 jurisdictions in Maryland. The training programs were highly concentrated in Central Maryland and parts of Southern Maryland; jurisdictions with some of the highest populations in the state. Amongst the jurisdictions with over 500,000 population, only Anne Arundel County does not have an accredited CHW certification training program. Only three (3) of nine (9) jurisdictions on the Eastern Shore had accredited CHW certification training programs, with accredited CHW certification training programs in Cecil, Dorchester and Wicomico Counties.
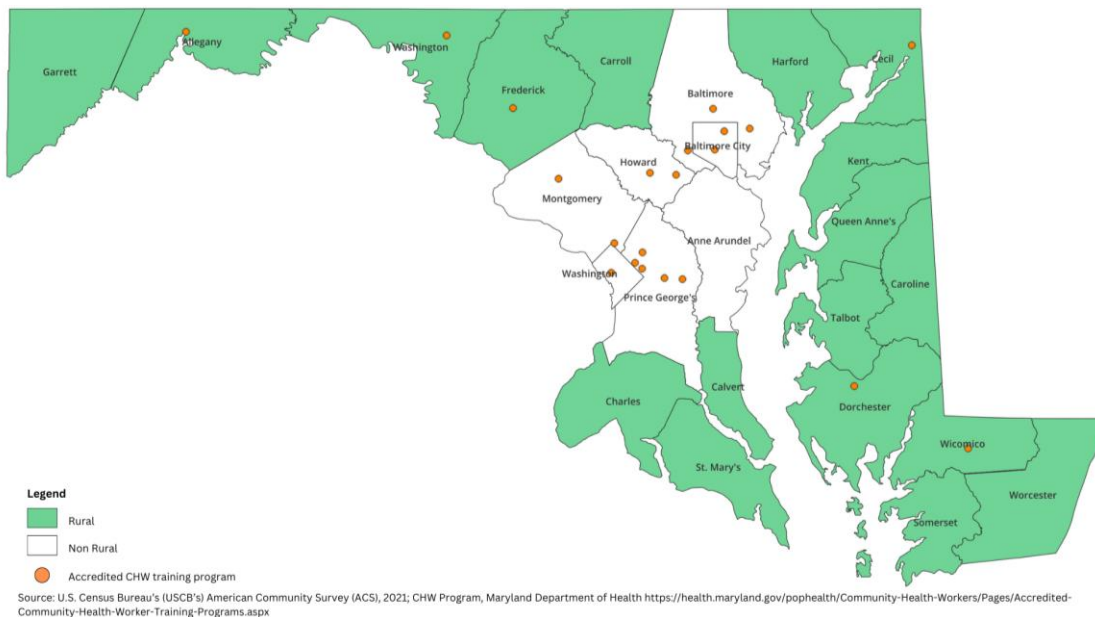
Figure 3: Locations of accredited CHW certification training programs and population distribution in jurisdictions in Maryland

Geographic Location of Accredited CHW Certification Training Programs by Rural Jurisdictions
The accredited CHW certification training programs were more concentrated in the non-rural jurisdictions (Montgomery County, Baltimore County, Baltimore City, Prince George's County, and Howard County). Anne Arundel County was the only non-rural jurisdiction without an accredited CHW certification training program. Rural jurisdictions had more sparsely located accredited CHW certification training programs, as seen in Western Maryland and the Eastern Shore. None of the rural jurisdictions in Southern Maryland had an accredited CHW certification training program.
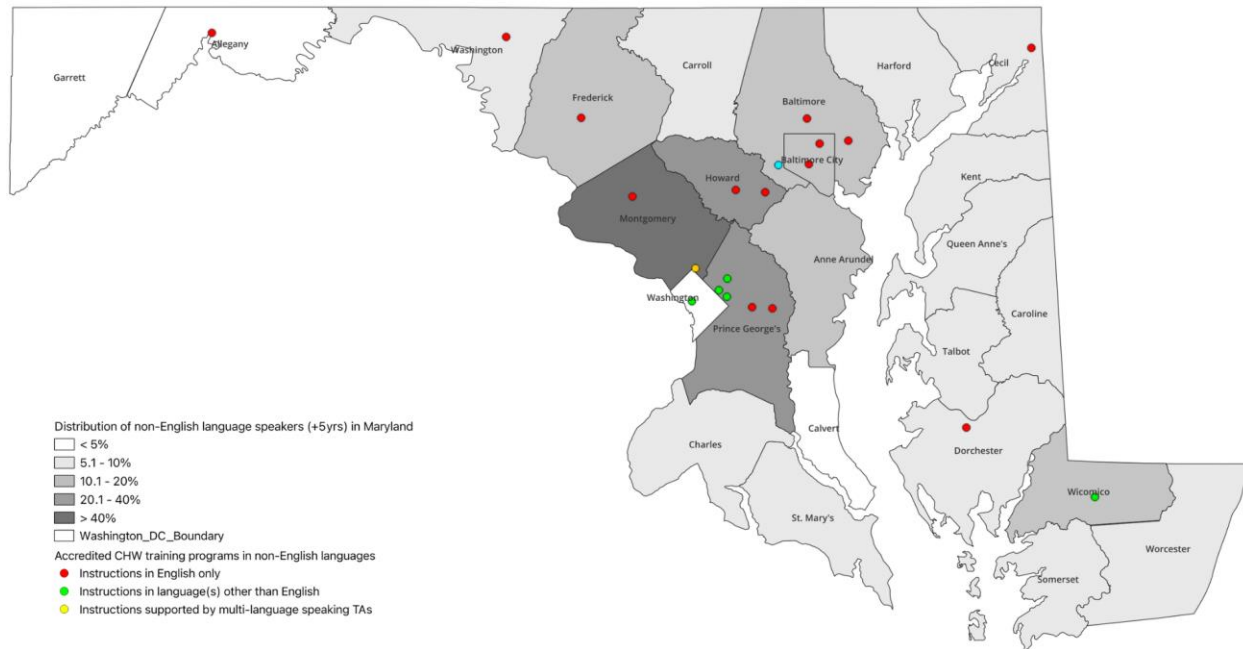
Figure 4: Locations of accredited CHW certification training programs by rural jurisdictions in Maryland

Geographic Location of Accredited CHW Certification Training Programs by non-English Language Speaking Populations and Language of Program Instruction

Figure 5 shows the locations of accredited CHW certification training programs, the languages of instruction offered by these programs, and the distribution of non-English language speaking residents by jurisdictions. Montgomery County has the highest number of non-English speaking residents and the only Spanish language-only accredited CHW certification training program in the state. Western Maryland and parts of the Eastern Shore notably do not have accredited CHW certification training programs offered in languages other than English, with the only accredited CHW certification training program taught in Spanish language located in Wicomico County.

Figure 5: Locations of accredited CHW certification training programs and distribution of non-English speaking residents by jurisdictions

Source: U.S. Census Bureau's (USCB's) American Community Survey (ACS), 2021; CHW Program, Maryland Department of Health https://health.maryland.gov/pophealth/Community-Health-Workers/Pages/Accredited-Community-Health-Worker-Training-Programs.aspx

Geographic Location of Accredited CHW Certification Training Programs by Median Income

The locations of the accredited CHW certification training programs were also considered in contrast to the distribution of median income across jurisdictions in the state. Figure 6 highlights the absence of any accredited training programs in Somerset County, the jurisdiction with the lowest median income in the state. With the exception of Baltimore City, most of the training programs were concentrated in jurisdictions with median incomes over $75,000 per annum.

Figure 6: Locations of accredited CHW certification training programs and distribution of median income by jurisdictions
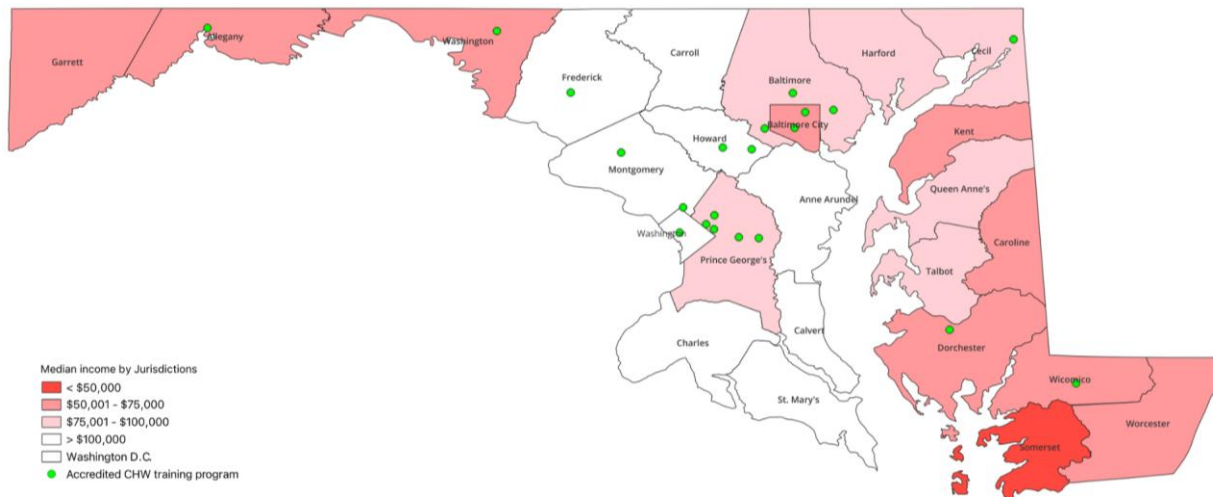

Source: U.S. Census Bureau's (USCB's) American Community Survey (ACS), 2021; CHW Program, Maryland Department of Health https://health.maryland.gov/pophealth/Community-Health-Workers/Pages/Accredited-Community-Health-Worker-Training-Programs.aspx

Assessment of Interest in Peer Networking and Digital Resource Sharing for Accredited CHW Certification Training Programs

<u>Interest in Peer Networking</u>

There was high interest in participating in peer networking opportunities and events, indicated by the 75% of responding accredited CHW certification training programs who answered 'Yes' when asked about their interest in participating in a peer network (Figure 7). The responding accredited CHW certification training programs were interested in the opportunity to collaborate with and learn from other accredited training programs. The accredited CHW certification training programs were also interested in networking opportunities with potential funding partners, employers of community health workers, and potential practicum partners. The following were identified as areas of interest:

- Learning: National certification, CHW safety, best practices, regional reciprocity, incorporating technology for virtual education
- Collaboration: Employment challenges, idea sharing, specialty curricula, multi-lingual services
- Networking: Workforce development, job readiness, job fairs

Accredited CHW certification training programs also shared their opinions on how networking for accredited CHW certification training programs can be structured. A few suggestions included webinars, conferences, workshops, and job fairs. Accredited CHW certification training programs were interested in monthly, quarterly, and annual events.
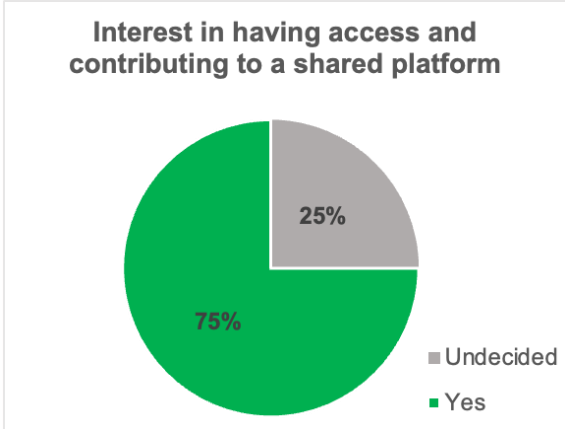
Figure 7: Accredited CHW certification training programs' interest in participating in a peer network

Interest in joining a peer network

25%

75%

■ Undecided

■ Yes
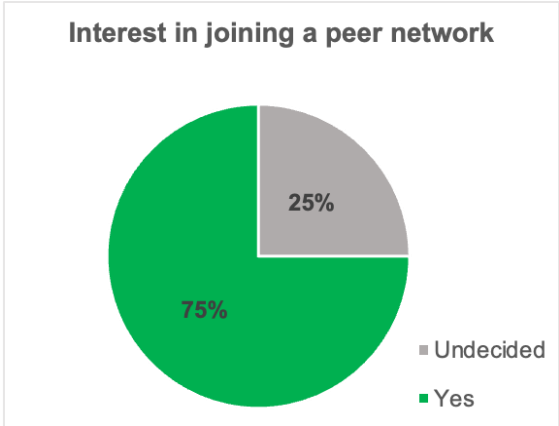
Interest in Digital Resource Sharing

Interest in accessing and contributing to a digital resource sharing platform was also assessed. Seventy-five percent (75%) of the responding accredited CHW certification training programs indicated they were interested in the opportunity to share and receive digital resources to support the delivery of training programs to CHW students in the state. Accredited CHW certification training programs also shared their opinions on how resource sharing could be functional. A few suggestions included using a designed shared Google Drive or compiled resources shared routinely via email.

Figure 8: Accredited CHW certification training programs' interest in participating in digital resource sharing

Interest in having access and contributing to a shared platform

25%

75%

■ Undecided

■ Yes

Key Successes of Accredited CHW Certification Training Programs

The accredited CHW certification training programs were asked to share their key successes in implementing their training programs over the course of their accreditation period. The following success themes were identified:

- Improved employability: Five (5) accredited CHW certification training programs identified the increased career prospects for students as a key success. Respondents noted that their training program provided students with a career path into health and healthcare fields and connections to employing organizations.

- Improved skills and knowledge: Four (4) accredited CHW certification training programs highlighted the improvements to soft and hard skills for students. Responding training programs provided training to students in areas such as oral and written communication, advocacy, the U.S. healthcare system, computer literacy, use of multimedia platforms, etc. Other areas of success, such as employer satisfaction and increased productivity, were also attributed to the improved skills and knowledge demonstrated by the students who had graduated from these programs.

- Positive participant feedback: Four (4) accredited CHW certification training programs noted the significance of the feedback received from students, trainers, and employing/practicum partners in their programs. Student satisfaction with the training program was reported as a key success for these programs, including satisfaction with the accredited training programs and satisfaction with practicing as trained CHWs in the health workforce.

- Building partnerships: Four (4) of the responding accredited CHW certification training programs noted that they had built partnerships with organizations including funding organizations, CHW employers, hospitals and other community-based organizations. These partnerships provided funding support, practicum placements, and future job placements for graduated CHWs.

- Funding support: Three (3) accredited CHW certification training programs identified government and non-government-sponsored grants they secured during the period of their accreditation. These fundings provided vital financial support to the training programs and students of the training program in the form of covered operational costs, free tuition costs, and/or periodic stipends for students.

- Successfully trained CHW students: Other programs noted the successful completion of the accredited CHW certification training programs by each cohort of students as a key success. While many students went on to work as CHWs, other students have continued in their education and careers to professions including nursing.

Key Challenges Faced by Accredited CHW Certification Training Programs

Accredited CHW certification training programs also shared some insights into the challenges that they faced in implementing their program during the period of their accreditation. The emerging themes include:

- Limited resources and capacity to meet demand: Five (5) accredited CHW certification training programs identified challenges with meeting the growing demand for CHW training. The responding training programs identified limited financial resources, learning materials, technology tools, and overall program capacity to deliver training to a high number of applicants.

- Securing practicum placements: Three (3) accredited CHW certification training programs reported securing practicum placements as a key challenge faced over the period of their accreditation. Two (2) of the programs noted that the growing demand for CHW training contributed to the challenge of securing practicum placements with hospitals, clinics, community organizations, and other health service providers for students to meet the 40-hour practicum requirements needed to complete and graduate from the program successfully. The demand for practicum placements for CHW students training in specialty areas like chronic disease management was also noted as a challenge by another accredited CHW certification training program.

- Availability of jobs for CHWs: The responding accredited CHW certification training programs also noted the lack of sustainable employment opportunities and insufficient potential earnings as a major drawback in keeping students interested in the training program and the longer-term career path of CHWs. Two (2) of the training programs noted the lack of a range of job opportunities for CHWs, while another training program noted the lack of incentives in CHW roles offered to graduated students as challenges that impacted their training programs.

- Low demand: One (1) accredited CHW certification training program highlighted the challenge of recruiting sufficient numbers of new students to commence a cohort, and sustain the program, citing cancellations of offers due to low enrollment.

- Other challenges: At least one (1) responding accredited CHW certification training program also identified these areas of challenges: language barriers, varying student reading comprehension levels, scheduling demands, and students not completing the program. These training programs had challenges delivering instructional components to cohorts of students from diverse backgrounds of languages, education history, and work-life balance. One (1) accredited CHW certification training program shared that some students had challenges completing the practicum components of their training, possibly due to the demands of time commitments, commuting, and even finding acceptable practicum placements.

Innovative Approaches to the instructional Design or Practicum Component of Accredited CHW Certification Training Programs

The survey and interviews collected information on innovative methods used by the responding accredited CHW certification training programs to deliver components of the training. We identified the following approaches as those used by the accredited CHW certification training programs:

- Virtual and blended learning: Virtual learning and virtual meeting platforms were used by some accredited CHW certification training programs to deliver combinations of synchronous and asynchronous learning to students. Five (5) of the training programs identified using this approach to manage the delivery of the instructional components of their training programs.
- Community-engaged practicum: Two (2) responding accredited CHW certification training programs described innovative approaches which incorporated community-based activities such as outreach, health education programs, and community speakers in the curriculum.
- Simulations and demonstrations: Students in at least three (3) accredited CHW certification training programs were exposed to simulation exercises involving Virtual and Augmented Reality and other technological tools for class presentations and mock client interactions.
- Other innovative approaches: Besides adopting technology use and community-based practices, another accredited CHW certification training program incorporated other learning and development components to the training, such as modules on values and equity. A different training program incorporated the CHW training into other health-related Associate Degree programs. Other innovative approaches reported included having multiple cohorts yearly to accommodate different students' schedules and providing flexible options for practicum sites, including community health service organizations where some students were already employed.

Impact of Accredited CHW Certification Training Programs on Their Communities

Responding CHWs were asked to share insights on what impact the accredited CHW certification training programs had on the communities served by the programs and the CHWs who graduated from those programs. Respondents highlighted the following areas of impact on communities:

- Partner collaboration: Ten (10) responding accredited CHW certification training programs identified the partnerships they have built with diverse organizations and institutions serving local communities and the successes of those partnerships as the key impact their programs have had on their communities. Some examples include: collaborations with CHW employers, community-based organizations, subject matter

experts, CHW program funders, local health departments, and health centers to strengthen the community health workforce, reduce medical costs, and deliver community health programs.

- Trained CHWs: Five (5) accredited CHW certification training programs identified the trained CHWs across different jurisdictions serving their communities as part of the health workforce as the key impact of their training programs on their communities. One (1) program highlighted the feelings of accomplishments among students who graduate from the program and their families as an impact outcome.

Impact of Accredited CHW Certification Training Programs on Their Graduated Students

Accredited CHW certification training programs responding to the survey also shared their views on the impact of the training programs on the CHW students who graduated from their programs. The following impact areas were identified:

- Increased employability: Ten (10) accredited CHW certification training programs reported that the students who graduated from their programs acquired new skills, knowledge, and certifications, making them more attractive candidates to employers.
- Professional development and career growth: Up to seven (7) accredited CHW certification training programs highlighted how students who graduated from their training programs had become better equipped to meet job requirements, demonstrate professionalism, and contribute effectively to patient and community health improvement. Five (5) of these responding programs noted that graduates of their training programs often went on to advance in positions at work.
- Financial incentives: One (1) accredited CHW certification training program also noted the benefit of financial support packages such as stipends and reimbursements on the financial wellness of students who completed the training program under grant/non-grant funded scholarships.
- Personal growth: Another accredited CHW certification training program also reported that students had gained confidence through their experiences in the program.

Future Goals of Accredited CHW Certification Training Programs

The survey asked the accredited CHW certification training programs what their future goals were. The responses were grouped into the following themes:

- Increase program accessibility: Six (6) accredited CHW certification training programs had future goals to make their CHW training programs available to more communities and populations. These training programs had different plans on how to achieve their goals, including offering their training in more locations and languages.
- Expand curriculum: Five (5) accredited CHW certification training programs hoped to expand their programs in the future, by offering other continuing education and

specialty curricula, including in areas of research, understanding the U.S. health system, mental health, neurodiversity, etc.
- Other goals: Two (2) accredited CHW certification training program reported having future goals to:
    - Build and sustain interest in their CHW training program.
    - Build and strengthen partnerships for collaborations in support of CHWs in the state.
    - Increase accredited training program's capacity to meet the demands for CHW training, and the health workforce needs of communities.
    - Offer more class schedule options to give students more flexible options.
    - Secure funding to sustain training program operations and cover tuition costs for students in the program.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats Analysis

The SWOT analysis in Figure 9 below highlights the strengths, weaknesses, and threats of the accreditation of CHW certification training programs.

Figure 9: SWOT Analysis identifying the strengths, opportunities, and threats of the accreditation of CHW certification training programs

	INTERNAL FACTORS	EXTERNAL FACTORS
POSITIVE	**STRENGTHS** • Growing visibility and demand for CHWs as a vital part of the workforce in improving community health outcomes • Trusting relationship between the CHW program and accredited CHW training programs	**OPPORTUNITIES** • Understand potential training program needs and how the CHW Program can support them • Identify training programs in high need areas based on geography, median income, student funding, language access
NEGATIVE	**WEAKNESSES** • N/A	**THREATS** • Low pay and threatened job security for CHWs • Insufficiently sustainable funding for CHW training programs • Low demand for CHW training that may stem from concerns for job and financial security

Strengths: The accredited CHW certification training programs showed overall satisfaction and were appreciative of the accreditation opportunity and the credibility that brings to their program. All 16 accredited CHW training program organizations communicated a positive and trusting relationship with the CHW Program. The accredited CHW certification training programs also communicated their passion for promoting the work of CHWs and their desire to continue to increase visibility for CHWs as vital pillars of the community health workforce.

Opportunities: This 'Spotlight' on accredited CHW certification training programs has presented an opportunity to understand the accredited CHW certification training program landscape in the state, including the needs of the accredited CHW certification training programs and the accessibility needs for potential CHW students across different jurisdictions. Accredited CHW certification training programs shared future goals aimed at sustaining CHW certification training, supporting CHW career development, and advocating for sustainable CHWs' employment. Many accredited CHW certification training programs are already working towards accomplishing related objectives.

Threats: Concerns about the sustainability of employment for CHWs were shared by 62.5% of the accredited CHW certification training programs, with some noting students failing to complete the program due to low financial expectations from the career path. Accredited CHW certification training programs also noted that the lack of reimbursements for CHW services in Medicaid & Medicare and other private insurance policies continues to be a deterrent for employers to engage and invest in CHWs.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This report provides the results and findings of a survey of accredited CHW certification training programs' successes, challenges, and future goals. Results represent the 16 accredited CHW certification training programs that responded to the survey and participated in interviews.

CHWs have established themselves as invaluable assets in the healthcare domain, particularly in bridging the divide between health and social services and underserved populations. Their deep-rooted understanding of the communities they represent, coupled with comprehensive training programs, ensures that they provide culturally relevant health education, increased access to healthcare services, and steadfast advocacy for community health. Maryland's commitment to enhancing the role of CHWs, as evident through the Maryland Community Health Worker Act and subsequent regulations, emphasizes the state's recognition of CHWs' significance.

The rigorous accreditation process overseen by the Maryland Department of Health guarantees that CHWs receive a specific standard of training, aligning with the core competencies essential for their roles. Since accreditation was granted to the first CHW certification training programs in October 2020, including four (4) retroactive accreditations from 2018 as allowed by regulations, hundreds of CHWs have gone through these programs and graduated from them. Since April 2020, 456 CHWs have obtained certification from the Department - a great success for the 18 accredited CHW certification training programs in the state.

This three-year exploration into the accredited CHW certification training programs has illuminated their achievements, hurdles, and future aims, providing valuable insights that can guide further advancements in CHW education and their broader integration into the healthcare system. There is an opportunity to support the development of CHWs in the state and their establishment in the health workforce by providing a platform (e.g., conferences and webinars) that can bring together CHW stakeholders across the state to exchange knowledge, collaborate, learn, and share experiences to help strengthen their programs and better meet the needs of the communities they serve. The accredited CHW certification training programs can utilize these platforms to network and build partnerships with employers of CHWs, funders of CHW programs, and other key CHW stakeholders.

The accredited CHW certification training programs can also be supported in developing curricula outside the MDH nine core competencies for CHW certification training programs. This process can particularly benefit from an evidence-based understanding of the health needs of underserved communities and the specialty area needs of CHW employers. The accredited CHW certification training programs would also benefit from receiving routine updates on community health needs, policy changes, and general information for CHW stakeholders. Given the high level of interest expressed by the accredited CHW certification training programs, the CHW Program can leverage this opportunity to explore a digital resource-sharing mechanism for accredited CHW certification training programs.

It is recommended that further research is needed to understand better how challenges around CHW job security can be addressed and accredited CHW certification training programs can be supported to improve the accessibility of CHW certification training programs in Maryland.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Accredited CHW Certification Training Program Survey

Accredited Community Health Worker (CHW) Certification Training Programs: Three-year Spotlight

The Maryland Department of Health Community Health Worker (CHW) Program would like to gather information from accredited CHW certification training programs to create a "Three Year Spotlight on Maryland Accredited CHW Certification Training Programs." Your participation is important, but voluntary. You may choose to skip questions or exit the survey at any time.

Answer the questions below for the period during which your training program was accredited by the Department of Health.

We hope to share the report with MDH, the State CHW Advisory Committee and Maryland CHW stakeholders. Individual training program information will only be shared with the permission of the training program.

Contact Information: You can contact the individuals listed below if you have questions regarding this survey.

Tina Backe
Office of Population Health Improvement, MDH
201 W. Preston St. Baltimore, MD 21201
Phone: 410-767-5590
Email: tina.backe@maryland.gov

If you have any questions about your rights as participant/subject, please contact:
Gay Hutchen
IRB Administrator, Office of the Inspector General
Baltimore MD 21201
Phone: 410-767-8448
Email: gay.hutchen@maryland.gov

* Indicates required question

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1. By clicking on "I agree to participate in this survey", you verify that: *
   - You have read the information above
   - You voluntarily agree to participate
   - You are representing a Maryland Accredited CHW certification training program

   Mark only one oval.

   ◯ I agree to participate in this survey

   ◯ I do not wish to participate in this survey

   General Information

2. Name *

   _____

3. Title *

   _____

4. Accredited CHW certification training program name *

   _____

5. Email *

   _____

   Program Information

   This section aims to collect information about your accredited CHW certification training program.

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6. How is the instructional component of your CHW training program delivered?

    Check all that apply.

    ☐ In person
    ☐ Virtual
    ☐ Hybrid

7. Is your CHW training program available in languages other than English?

    Mark only one oval.

    ⬭ Yes
    ⬭ No

8. If you answered 'Yes' to the previous question, please list all languages that your training program is offered in.

    _____

9. How is the cost of the training paid by the student and/or by the training program? Select all that apply.

    Check all that apply.

    ☐ Fully paid by student
    ☐ Grant-funded scholarships/stipends
    ☐ Non-grant funded scholarships/stipends
    ☐ Other: If other is selected, please add a description in the question below.

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10. If you selected an answer other than "Fully paid by student," please describe the qualifying criteria for scholarship/stipend options or other options.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

11. Does your training program include any specialty training areas (e.g., diabetes, behavioral health, maternal and child health, etc.)?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

12. If applicable, please list and describe any specialty training areas provided by your training program.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

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13. Does your CHW training program offer professional development opportunities for CHWs to renew their CHW certificate?

Mark only one oval.

◯ Yes

◯ No

◯ Under consideration

14. If yes to the previous question, please list and describe the professional development opportunities (e.g., title/focus area, number of training hours, etc.).

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Successes, Challenges and Impact

This section provides a place for you to share the successes, challenges, and impact of your training program.

15. Share key successes of your training program.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

16. Share innovative approaches to the instructional design or practicum component of your training program.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

17. Share key challenges faced by your training program.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

18. **Share the impact of your training program on your community (e.g., collaboration with partners, etc.).**

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

19. Share the impact of your training program on the students who have graduated from the program (e.g., employment opportunities, etc.).

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

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20.   Describe any future goals for your CHW certification training program (e.g., trainings offered in other languages, trainings offered in other locations, offering additional training times, etc.).

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Potential Collaborations

In this section, we would like to learn more about your interest in participating in a peer network and in sharing resources.

21.   Would you be interested in joining a peer network for Maryland accredited CHW training programs?

Mark only one oval.

◯ Yes

◯ No

◯ Undecided

22.   If yes, list potential topics of interest or other networking ideas.

_____

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23.   Would your training program be interested in having access and contributing to a shared platform for accredited CHW certification training programs to share documents/resources (e.g., articles, research papers, etc.)?

Mark only one oval.

◯ Yes

◯ No

◯ Undecided

24.   Is your organization able to host a resource sharing platform (e.g. shared Google drive, etc.)?

Mark only one oval.

◯ Yes

◯ No

◯ Not sure

25.   Are you willing to participate in an in-person or virtual follow up interview?

Mark only one oval.

◯ Yes, in person only

◯ Yes, virtual only

◯ Yes, in person or virtual

◯ No

◯ Undecided

26. Are you willing to contact a student who has graduated from your program to determine if they are interested in an in-person or virtual interview by the CHW Program and that they consent to the sharing of their name, email, and phone number with the CHW Program?

Mark only one oval.

◯ Yes

◯ No

◯ Undecided

27. Thank you for completing this survey. Is there any other information you would like to share with the CHW Program?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

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Appendix B: Accredited CHW Certification Training Program Interview Questions

1. Would you elaborate on the key successes of your CHW training program since it has been accredited and the factors that contributed to them (e.g., recruitment, one enrollment, practicum partners, collaborations, etc.)?
2. Would you elaborate on innovative methods your program uses in the training of CHWs?
3. Can you share a story (or two) you feel best exemplifies the success of your training program (e.g., has the community benefited in the last 3 years, etc.)?
4. Other than students who complete your program being eligible for certification, what has been the impact of your training program becoming accredited by the Department of Health (e.g., new collaborations w/ partners, etc.)?
5. Do you gather any longitudinal information from your students after they graduate such as the communities they serve and where they are employed?
6. If yes, do you know where your students have been employed and who the main employers are?
7. What challenges, if any, have you faced during the implementation of your CHW training program, and how have you addressed them?
8. If yes, will you share how your students have been impacted by the program or any notable successes of graduates?
9. Will you elaborate on the future goals for the program and strategies to achieve these goals?
10. In your opinion, what can be done to enhance the effectiveness and reach of CHW training programs in Maryland for CHWs?
11. Will you elaborate on your opinions on networking and peer sharing opportunities for accredited training programs?
12. How can the CHW Program support your efforts as an accredited CHW training Program?
13. Is there anything else you would like to share about your program that we haven't touched on yet?

Appendix C: Graduated CHW Student interview Questions

1. What motivated you to complete a CHW certification training program?
2. Did you apply for and receive your CHW certification after completing the training program?
    a. If yes: Was the certification application process clear or do you have a recommendation on how the process could be improved?
3. A CHW certification is effective for 2 (two) years. Have you applied or will you be applying soon for the renewal of your certification?
    a. If yes: Was the certification renewal application process clear or do you have a recommendation on how the process could be improved?
4. What were the most valuable aspects of your training program?
5. Can you share a specific example or story where the skills you learned in the program
   were applied in your work as a CHW in your community?
6. How did the training program prepare you for the realities of working as a CHW in your community?
7. How has the completion of the training program impacted your future career goals?
8. What recommendations do you have for CHW training programs to meet the needs of Maryland CHWs?
9. Is there anything else you would like to share with us?