

**POLICY MEMORANDUM**  
**FOR: HOUSE RESOLUTION 8211**  
**Community Health Workers in Rhode Island**  
**By Lily Neves**  
**For Rep. Rebecca Kislak**  
**May 12, 2026**

**Background & Introduction:**

Community health workers (CHWs) are versatile public health workforce members Rhode Island can use to promote health and wellness across the state. CHWs are frontline public health workers who are also members of or have a close understanding of the community they serve.<sup>1</sup> CHWs provide outreach, health education, and can act as a link to programs and services, advocacy, and hands on enrollment assistance.<sup>2</sup> Homes, community centers, clinics and hospitals are common locations where CHWs work,

**Where do community health workers work?**

Community health workers are defined as working closely with the community and have a deep understanding of the community they serve. Examples of places where CHWs could be placed include libraries, schools, senior centers, and other types of local community centers. This section will review studies conducted with CHWs in different locations and if the people who they interacted with benefited from the CHW's help.

***CHWs work in schools!***

A systematic review was conducted in 2023 by Michael D. Harries, Nuo Xu, Michael S. Bertenthal, et. al to study different ways community health workers can benefit schools. The researchers conducted a literature review of previous studies with keywords, “community health workers,” “school,” and “children.”<sup>3</sup> The researchers found 13 studies to include in the data extraction and analysis.<sup>4</sup> The study showed that of the 13 total studies evaluated, eight (62%) reported positive outcomes, five of which (38%), reported statistically significant outcomes.<sup>5</sup> Three studies reported non-statistically significant outcomes.<sup>6</sup> The majority of studies showed positive outcomes for children and parents which ranged from self-efficacy to knowledge to

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<sup>1</sup> "Community Health Workers," American Public Health Association, accessed May 11, 2026.

<https://www.apha.org/apha-communities/member-sections/community-health-workers>

<sup>2</sup> "What is a Community Health Worker?" Community Health Worker Association of RI, accessed March 29, 2026, <https://chwari.org/what-is-a-community-health-worker/>

<sup>3</sup> Harries, Xu, Berenthal, et. al. "Community Health Workers in Schools," 15.

<sup>4</sup> Harries, Xu, Berenthal, et. al. "Community Health Workers in Schools," 16.

<sup>5</sup> Harries, Xu, Berenthal, et. al. "Community Health Workers in Schools," 18.

<sup>6</sup> Harries, Xu, Berenthal, et. al. "Community Health Workers in Schools," 18.

condition specific measures.<sup>7</sup> The studies also showed an increase in recruitment for CHWs in schools. CHW recruitment was most commonly done by referrals from principals and other community stakeholders. With an increase in recruitment of CHWs, it helps to serve more families in more communities!

While there are nurses in schools, they primarily help students with immediate medical needs and emergency situations for an entire school. School nurses may be overwhelmed with students with various health conditions such as diabetes or asthma they may not be able to dedicate enough time to health education. Community health workers can support school nurses by acting as a liaison to students and providing educational opportunities for students.

### ***CHWs work in libraries!***

Another study was conducted by training public library staff in community health work by Anna U. Morgan, Bernadette A. D'Alonzo, Roxanne Dupuis, et. al. The researchers created a curriculum based on common challenges and topic areas the library staff assisted with mental health and substance use, homelessness and housing insecurity, challenges associated with immigration, and trauma.<sup>8</sup> The results saw statistically significant improvements in self-efficacy in all four of the topic areas (mental health and substance use, homelessness & housing insecurity, refugees & immigration, and trauma, resilience, & burnout).<sup>9</sup> Library staff also reported they believed the training was valuable in learning how to have difficult conversations with patrons and created better collaboration among colleagues on how to best help the patrons.<sup>10</sup>

CHWs are in libraries all over the country. Currently, CHWs are in libraries in Queens, New York, Michigan, Maryland, Idaho, California and more.<sup>11</sup> At the Queens Library in New York, they built partnerships with local hospitals and health centers to offer prenatal classes, sessions on cancer and Ebola, and family building programs for the LGBTQ+ community.<sup>12</sup>

### ***CHWs work in community centers!***

CHWs thrive when they are placed in community centers like schools and libraries, and they effectively support their communities. CHWs in schools can be a resource for students and parents who may need to learn about health conditions and making healthy choices. In libraries, CHWs can serve a wider population, especially if the CHW lives in the same community they work in. For example, a CHW who lives in Barrington would not be as effective as a CHW in a public library in Providence and vice versa.

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<sup>7</sup> Harries, Xu, Berenthal, et. al. "Community Health Workers in Schools," 18.

<sup>8</sup> Anna U. Morgan, Bernadette A. D'Alonzo, Roxanne Dupuis, et. al. "Public Library Staff as Community Health Partners: Training Program Design and Evaluation." *Health Promotion Practice* 19, no. 3 (2018): 361-368.

<sup>9</sup> Morgan, D'Alonzo, Dupuis, et. al. "Public Library Staff as Community Health Partners," 365.

<sup>10</sup> Morgan, D'Alonzo, Dupuis, et. al., "Public Library Staff as Community Health Partners." 365.

<sup>11</sup> Lindsey Wahowiak, "Libraries, public health work together on community health: Settings serve as community hubs" *The Nation's Health*, October 18, 2018, <https://www.thenationshealth.org/content/48/8/1.2>

<sup>12</sup> Wahowiak, "Libraries, public health work together."

## **Policy Recommendation:**

There are over 9,000 public library systems across the United States and they host over 1.5 billion in-person visits annually.<sup>13</sup> Library visits exceed physician visits by more than 50%.<sup>14</sup> Rhode Island has 48 public library systems and over 70 library branches throughout the state. Libraries can be the community center where community health workers are located and people can go for health education.

CHWs can be sustained through a comprehensive approach as part of a larger health improvement strategy to address mental, physical, and social needs of people in the community.<sup>15</sup> Should there be a network of CHWs who work in public libraries across the state, it would also be important to create a connection between the CHWs and other community health care partners and teams.<sup>16</sup>

House Resolution 8211 will allow the CHWs workforce to continue to support their communities, even in the face of limitations put on the program by Medicaid. A \$10,000,000 appropriation will allow the CHW program to thrive and serve vulnerable Rhode Islanders in community centers and libraries where they have an intricate understanding of the people they work with.

## **Conclusion:**

Rhode Island is a state that thrives in community. When someone walks into a local grocery store, it is more likely than not that they will see someone they know. Community Health Workers are the people Rhode Islanders can turn to for health education and promotion in their local community spaces such as public libraries.

In conclusion, based on recent studies, the updated Medicaid program requirements, and sustainability road maps, The Rhode Island House of Representatives should pass the \$10 million appropriations bill to fund Community Health Workers in public libraries.

Community health workers are people who know their communities. They are peers and friends with the people they work with. Overwhelmingly, in the studies discussed above, CHWs have greatly benefited their communities when placed in public libraries and schools.

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<sup>13</sup> Morgan, D'Alonzo, Dupuis, et. al "Public Library Staff as Community Health Partners," 362.

<sup>14</sup> Morgan, D'Alonzo, Dupuis, et. al "Public Library Staff as Community Health Partners," 362.

<sup>15</sup> Saha, "Charting a Roadmap."

<sup>16</sup> Saha, "Charting a Roadmap."