REPORT 7 OF THE COUNCIL ON MEDICAL SERVICE (I-15) Incorporating Community Health Workers into the US Health Care System (Resolution 805-I-14) (Reference Committee J)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At the American Medical Association's (AMA) 2014 Interim Meeting, the House of Delegates referred Resolution 805, which asked the AMA to: 1) encourage the incorporation of community health workers into the US health care system and support legislation that integrates community health workers into care delivery models especially in communities of economically disadvantaged, rural, and minority populations; and 2) support appropriate stakeholders to define community health workers in order to define their required level of training and scope of practice and to legitimize their role as health care providers. The Board of Trustees assigned this issue to the Council on Medical Service for a report back to the House at the 2015 Interim Meeting.

The following report discusses the diverse roles that community health workers assume in the community and broader health care system, provides examples of community health worker programs and ethical guidelines, and outlines the current funding structure of community health worker programs. The Council developed this report consistent with the tone and scope of Policy H-373.994, Patient Navigator Programs, which the House established when it adopted the recommendations of Council on Medical Service Report 7-I-11. The Council's concerns and expectations with patient navigators mirror those regarding community health workers. Accordingly, the Council recommends that the broad principles in Policy H-373.994 should apply to community health workers as well.

Specifically, Policy H-373.994 states that the role of navigators is to enhance the patient's ability to make appropriate health care choices, that there needs to be communication between the navigator and the patient's medical team, that navigators should refrain from any activity that could be construed as clinical in nature, and that patient navigators should disclose their training and credentials, as well as any potential conflicts of interest. In addition to linking community health workers to these navigator principles, the Council offers a number of recommendations to further articulate AMA policy with respect to these non-clinical members of physician-led health care teams.

Community health workers are broadly defined as community members who work almost exclusively in community settings and who serve as connectors between health care consumers and providers to promote health among groups that have traditionally lacked adequate health care.

Due to the diversity of roles and responsibilities of community health workers, it is challenging to identify a single set of guidelines applicable to all community health workers. The Council believes existing industry guidelines provide a strong framework for ensuring community health workers work properly to enhance and supplement the work of the physician-led health care team. Further, the Council believes that appropriate stakeholders must work to establish not only core competencies but also clear training and continuing education requirements.

REPORT OF THE COUNCIL ON MEDICAL SERVICE

Subject:	Incorporating Community Health Workers into the US Health Care System (Resolution 805-I-14)
Presented by:	Robert E. Hertzka, MD, Chair
Referred to:	Reference Committee J (Jeffrey P. Gold, MD, Chair)

1 At the American Medical Association's (AMA) 2014 Interim Meeting, the House of Delegates 2 referred Resolution 805, "Incorporating Community Health Workers into the US Health Care 3 System," submitted by the AMA Medical Student Section. Resolution 805-I-14 asked "that the 4 AMA: 1) encourage the incorporation of community health workers into the US health care system 5 and support legislation that integrates community health workers into care delivery models 6 especially in communities of economically disadvantaged, rural, and minority populations; and 2) support appropriate stakeholders to define community health workers in order to define their 7 8 required level of training and scope of practice and to legitimize their role as health care providers." The Board of Trustees referred this issue to the Council on Medical Service (CMS) for 9 10 a report back to the House at the 2015 Interim Meeting. 11 The following report discusses the diverse roles that community health workers assume in the 12 13 community and broader health care system, provides examples of community health worker programs and ethical guidelines, outlines the current funding structure of community health worker 14 15 programs, and recommends policy to help define the appropriate role of community health 16 workers as part of a patient's health care team. 17 18 BACKGROUND 19 20 Community health workers (CHWs) are known as peer advocates, community health 21 representatives, and patient navigators, among many terms, and are broadly defined as "community members who work almost exclusively in community settings and who serve as connectors 22 between health care consumers and providers to promote health among groups that have 23 traditionally lacked access to adequate health care."¹ The Council is defining CHWs as public 24 health workers serving as intermediaries between health services and the community. This 25 definition encompasses non-clinical workers serving the community including those serving as 26 patient navigators. The scope of CHWs varies greatly depending on the sector and state in which 27 they work. CHWs are uniquely qualified as intermediaries between the populations they serve and 28 29 the health care system, because they live in, and speak the language of the community, and recognize and understand cultural issues. CHW expertise is based on shared life experiences with 30 31 those they serve. The community health worker model has its origins in antipoverty programs and 32 in efforts to address health care disparities and improve health outcomes among underserved 33 populations. Since the 1960s, CHWs have helped patients navigate the health care system by

decreasing socioeconomic barriers to care. The US recently has seen increased attention to these 1 2 non-traditional health care workers and their potential value due to evidence that some 3 interventions involving CHWs have produced positive outcomes for management of diabetes, 4 hypertension, asthma, cancer, and HIV/AIDS. 5 6 In 2002, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) recognized that CHWs offer promise as a resource to 7 increase racial and ethnic minorities' access to care while liaising between health care providers 8 and the community.² Subsequently, in 2010, both the US Department of Labor (DOL) and the 9 Affordable Care Act (ACA) expressly recognized both patient navigators and the broader 10 profession of CHWs.³ The DOL created a unique occupational code for CHWs, and the ACA identified CHWs as members of the health care workforce who may be used to provide outreach. 11 12 promote positive health behaviors, and guide underserved populations to appropriate health care resources. The ACA authorized the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to issue 13 14 grants to organizations utilizing CHWs although Congress never appropriated funding for the 15 grants. 16 17 CURRENT ROLE OF COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS 18 19 Consistent with the ACA's emphasis on community-based prevention, health care teams, and the 20 growing recognition of disparities in health outcomes across ethnic groups, CHWs represent a 21 developing resource to assist in providing care that is accessible and culturally competent. 22 Literature generally recognizes seven core roles of CHWs: those promoting cultural mediation 23 between communities and the health care system; those providing culturally appropriate and 24 accessible health education and information; those ensuring that people get the services they need; 25 those providing informal counseling and social support; those advocating for individuals and communities; those providing direct services and administering health screening tests; and those 26 building individual and community capacity.⁴ These categories are not mutually exclusive, and 27 many CHW programs exhibit a number of these core values, which continue to guide the field. 28 29 30 Hundreds of programs across the country utilize CHWs in a variety of ways, and, when providing 31 services as an integrated member of the primary health care team, CHWs can have a positive effect on the health outcomes of patients.⁵ CHWs serve as intermediaries between clinical services and 32 the community. The information CHWs gather about patients' health status and unique 33 34 socioeconomic barriers to health are relayed to the health care team to tailor the patient's care plan. 35 36 The Mississippi Delta Health Collaborative (MDHC), a state Department of Health initiative, aims 37 to provide leadership and guidance in the Delta region to improve the population's cardiovascular health by using CHWs.⁶ All CHWs in the program are from the Delta region, are state health 38 39 department employees, and receive initial and ongoing competency and clinic-based training. 40 MDHC's CHWs are integrated into and receive referrals of patients with elevated blood pressure 41 from various sites such as health care providers at federally qualified health centers (FQHCs) and rural clinics.⁷ CHWs follow an approach intended to establish and maintain links to the health care 42 43 system and maintain adherence to treatment protocol. CHWs help physicians with care 44 coordination by conducting home visits to monitor cardiovascular risk factors, helping patients 45 schedule appointments, and linking patients with transportation services to access health care. 46 47 A University of Pennsylvania Medicine program at two clinics incorporates CHWs into the 48 primary care team to improve the health of vulnerable patients dealing with chronic conditions.⁸ 49 The CHWs are part of the Individualized Management for Patient-Centered Targets (IMPaCT) 50 program where trained CHWs provide social support and health care system navigation assistance 51 to socioeconomically vulnerable patients. At the clinic, patients dealing with chronic conditions

discuss a specific health goal with their primary care provider, and CHWs help the patient carry out 1

2 that goal. Over a six-month time frame, patients work with a CHW to create a plan to achieve the

goal. Goals may include addressing food insecurity, economic issues like affording basic utilities, 3 4 creating a plan to increase medication adherence, or addressing addiction. The framework allows

5 for patients to receive holistic care and empower the patient to follow-through on their care plans

- 6 by addressing barriers to health that may be non-medical.
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8 As part of the CDC Division of Diabetes Translation, the CDC partnered with Marshall University 9 to create the Appalachian Diabetes Control and Translation Project (ADCTP), which is aimed at 10 reducing the impact of diabetes on people living in high-risk counties in the Appalachian Region.⁹ 11 As part of the ADCTP, groups of CHWs throughout the Appalachian Region are developing 12 partnerships and collaborating with community organizations to develop ways to promote healthier 13 lifestyles and increase prevention efforts. The ADCTP specifically targets economically distressed adult populations disproportionately affected by type 2 diabetes.¹⁰ CHW-led projects include 14 15 education on healthy eating and exercise habits, health fairs, and support groups. CHWs also 16 provide instruction to patients on diabetes self-management.

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18 **FUNDING**

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20 While some CHWs are volunteers, the majority of CHW programs rely on paid CHW positions.¹¹ Because the profession lacks broad recognition and acceptance, there is difficulty establishing and 21 22 maintaining CHW program funds. Current CHW program funding sources vary and many are 23 mixed. About two-thirds of all CHW programs use multiple funding streams from a combination of both public and private sources.¹² Generally, funding sources are grouped into one of three 24 25 categories: time-limited grants, state and local funds, and public or private insurance.

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27 Time-Limited Grants

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29 Most programs rely, at least in part, on time-limited grants. Time-limited grants may be as short as 30 a year or as long as three years, and come from sources like private foundations and government 31 agencies. Many grant programs target a specific condition or population, such as asthmatic children 32 in an underserved community. While there is relative availability of grants, most are not renewable, 33 so CHW programs are at high risk of disruption and termination when the grant terminates.

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35 State and Local Funds

36 CHW programs funded through state and local funds are allocated each budget cycle and make 37 funding of CHWs directly available.¹³ Under this model, the funds may either pay CHW salaries 38 39 directly or be designated to an organization that administers the program. Of course, the nature of 40 these funds makes them susceptible to budget restrictions and cuts. Additionally, such funding is 41 highly dependent on each state and locality's budget and political situation.

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43 Private or Public Insurance

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Both private and public insurance have played a role in the funding of CHW positions.¹⁴ Insurance 45 46 plans may fund CHW positions in a number of ways either through direct reimbursement, indirect

47 payment, or capitation. Some health plans are paying CHWs via capitation as part of the health

48 care team. Public insurance such as Medicaid has been used by a number of states to fund their

49 CHW programs and has emerged as relatively stable since it accesses an existing health care

50 financing mechanism. Medicaid managed care organizations may use capitated payments to

51 employ CHWs or organizations such as federally qualified health centers can be reimbursed for

Medicaid administrative costs performed by CHWs.¹⁵ Also, Medicaid Section 1115 waivers permit 1 2 states to implement demonstration projects to further the goals of Medicaid, and a number of states 3 have utilized section 1115 waivers as a means of financing their CHW initiatives.¹⁶ 4 5 COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS PROGRAMS AND STANDARDS 6 7 The community health worker's role varies considerably and depends on the sector in which they 8 work. The skills and competencies for a CHW working to promote nutrition and immunization 9 differ from those of a CHW working to connect patients with clinical services. Because each 10 community's needs differ and the skills required for any particular CHW program vary, it is a challenge developing standardized training or certification. A 2002 IOM report identified barriers 11 12 to the effective use of CHWs in multidisciplinary health care teams including inconsistent CHW scope of practice, training, and qualifications.¹⁷ 13 14 15 As the role of CHWs in the health care system increases, so too does interest in formalizing and standardizing workforce training requirements. Five states have laws or regulations establishing a 16 17 certification program, seven states have no law but have established a state-led training or certification program, while others have remained silent on the issue altogether leaving requisite 18 training or certification requirements the responsibility of the CHW program.¹⁸ 19 20 Texas enacted legislation requiring the Department of State Health Services (DSHS) to establish a 21 CHW training program, which is mandatory for those CHWs who are compensated for their 22 services.¹⁹ To become a certified CHW, an individual must be at least 18 years old and complete a 23 DSHS-approved 160 hour competency-based training program or prove the completion of at least 24 1,000 hours of CHW services within the last 6 years.²⁰ The established core competencies include 25 communication skills, interpersonal skills, organizational skills, and knowledge of specific health 26 27 issues. Certified CHWs are required to renew their certification and complete continuing education biannually.²¹ 28 29 30 Indiana does not have legislation establishing CHW certification; rather, certification is 31 department-established. The Indiana Division of Mental Health and Addiction and the Department 32 of Health jointly established a training and certification program for CHWs. In order to be eligible, individuals must be at least 18 years old and have a high school diploma or equivalent. The training 33 34 program is three-days and ends with a final exam. The program is module-based and covers topics 35 such as communication skills, cultural understanding, prevention, chronic illness, behavioral 36 health, and outreach. Upon completion of the training, certified CHWs may serve in a variety of settings including hospitals, clinics, and community centers. 37 38 39 Kentucky lacks legislation establishing CHW certification and does not require CHW certification. 40 Any CHW certification largely occurs at individual CHW programs. For example, the Kentucky 41 Homeplace Program, a CHW program delivering education on prevention and disease selfmanagement, requires certification to work in the program. Certification requires CHWs to have a 42 high school diploma or equivalent and complete 40 hours of training on chronic disease 43 44 management, cancer prevention, in-home visiting safety, communication, and liability and legal instruction.²² Additionally, the certification requires three months of shadowing an experienced 45 CHW wherein CHWs meet the community providers with whom they will work.²³ After the 46

47 certificate is earned, there are continual trainings on various topics such as communicable diseases
 48 and child abuse.²⁴

1 Ethical Standards

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The Community Health Worker Code of Ethics is based on and supported by the core values adopted by the American Association of Community Health Workers (AACHW), a national professional CHW group. The Code of Ethics provides a framework for CHWs, supervisors, and employers of CHWs to guide the discussion of ethical issues facing the profession. Not only are employers encouraged to consider this Code when creating CHW programs, but also, numerous states, including Indiana and Massachusetts, have developed ethical standards using the CHW Code as a model.

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11 The CHW Code of Ethics is based upon commonly understood principals that apply to all health 12 and social service professionals including the promotion of social justice, improved health, and 13 dignity. The core of the CHW Code is that the responsibility of all CHWs is to strive for excellence by providing quality service and the most accurate information available to individuals, families, 14 15 and communities. It includes sections on confidentiality, equitable relationships, rights and responsibilities, and the scope of ability and training. The CHW Code specifically directs CHWs to 16 17 disclose qualifications, training, experience, and credentials. The CHW Code, however, does not 18 address all ethical issues facing CHWs and states that the absence of a rule does not imply that 19 there is no ethical obligation present. As professionals, CHWs are encouraged to reflect on the 20 ethical obligations that they have to the communities that they serve.

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22 RELEVANT AMA POLICY

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Policy D-165.975 directs the AMA to highlight the need for improved access to quality health care
 for all disadvantaged, working with the private sector and government at all levels to improve
 health care access for this population.

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28 Policy H-373.994, established with CMS Report 7-I-11, addresses patient navigators, who are non-29 clinical patient advocates whose role is encompassed in the broader term of community health 30 workers. The Council's concerns and expectations with patient navigators mirror those regarding 31 CHWs. Policy H-373.994 recognizes that patient navigator services may help improve access to 32 care and help patients manage aspects of the health care system and that information provided by 33 the patient navigator enhances a patient's ability to make appropriate health care choices. The 34 policy provides guidelines to patient navigator programs to ensure patient navigators foster patient empowerment while explicitly refraining from any activity that could be construed as clinical in 35 36 nature. Policy states patient navigator programs should establish procedures to ensure direct 37 communication between the navigator and the patient's health care team. The policy emphasizes 38 that patient navigators should fully disclose relevant training, experience, credentials, and potential 39 conflicts of interest. The policy also calls for the AMA to work with other organizations to ensure patient navigators are free of bias and do not usurp the physician's role or responsibility for patient 40 41 education or treatment planning.

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The AMA has extensive policy related to individuals who work with patients as part of a health
care team. Several policies reinforce the concept of physicians bearing the ultimate responsibility
for care and advocate that allied health professionals such as nurses and physician assistants
function under the supervision of a physician (e.g. Policies H-35.970, H-45.973, H-35.989).

47 Policy H-160.912 advocates that all members of a physician-led team be enabled to perform

- 48 medical interventions that they are capable of performing according to their education, training and
- 49 licensure, and the discretion of the physician team leader. Policy H-160.938 promotes a physician-
- 50 led team approach to disease-specific patient care and self-management programs. Policy H-35.996
- 51 states that hospital medical staffs should have the authority to determine what functions and

1 services should be made available for patient care by members of "emerging or expanding health

2 professions." Policy H-160.906 defines "physician-led" in the context of team-based health care as

the consistent use by a physician of the leadership, knowledge, skill, and expertise necessary to

4 identify, engage, and elicit from each team member the unique set of training, experience, and

qualifications needed to help patients achieve their care goals, and to supervise the application ofthose skills.

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DISCUSSION

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10 The general concept of community health workers is consistent with the patient-centered medical 11 home model, which emphasizes physician-led, team-based care that is coordinated and integrated 12 across all elements of the health care system and the patient's community (Policy H-160.919). 13 Providing open communication and serving between health systems and communities facilitates 14 access to and improves the quality and cultural competence of care. Conversely, to the extent CHW 15 services have the potential to restrict care or interfere with the patient-physician relationship by interfering with and contradicting treatment plans, it is important that our AMA be prepared to 16 17 confront this potential intrusion. To mitigate risk of interference, the Council believes CHWs 18 should work under a protocol developed by the physician-led health care team regarding any activity relating to clinical matters. Because CHWs encompass the role of patient navigators, the 19 Council recommends Policy H-373.994, Patient Navigator Programs, be amended and apply to 20 21 community health workers.

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23 Because of the diversity of roles and responsibilities of community health workers, it is challenging to identify a single set of guidelines applicable to all CHWs. The Council believes that the CHW 24 25 Code of Ethics, supported by the AACHW, provides a strong framework for ensuring CHWs work properly to enhance and supplement the work of the physician-led health care team. The CHW 26 27 Code specifically calls for cooperation among other health care providers and recognizes 28 limitations on the services they can provide. The Council finds these principles imperative, and 29 believes it is important the CHWs refrain from any activity that could be construed as clinical in 30 nature, including interpreting test results, diagnosing illness or disease, or making treatment 31 recommendations. Where appropriate, CHWs may use clinical experience or training to help 32 patients better understand information provided by their physician or other members of their health 33 care team.

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The CHW Code directs that all CHWs be truthful and forthright in presenting their background and training to health care providers and be truthful about qualification and competencies to individuals, families, and communities. Though not stated in the CHW Code, the Council believes it is in the interest of patients for CHWs to be subject to background checks as they will have contact with patients and may have access to personal and medical information. The role of the CHW is built on trust, and full disclosure of background and training allows patients to determine

- 41 which services the CHW is qualified to perform.
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CHWs serve in a wide variety of roles within the health care system, and there is a lack of
 specificity regarding distinct roles and responsibilities. The Council believes the current absence of

44 specificity regarding distinct roles and responsibilities. The Council believes the current absence 45 standardized core competencies and standardized training contributes to this lack of professional

45 standardized core competencies and standardized training contributes to this fack of professional 46 acceptance. The Council believes that appropriate stakeholders must work to establish not only a

40 acceptance. The Council beneves that appropriate stakeholders must work to establish hot off 47 set of defined core competencies and skills but also establish clear training and continuing

48 education requirements. CHWs have the capacity to be valuable members of the health care team.

49 To do so, their roles and responsibilities must be clarified, and their training must be standardized

50 as appropriate for the services they provide.

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1 The lack of sustainable funding disrupts the services CHWs provide and prevents health care teams 2 from realizing their full potential. The expanding evidence base for CHW programs suggests their 3 strong potential for improving health outcomes; however, programs are often not sustained due in 4 large part to limited and time-sensitive funding mechanisms. Establishing sustainable funding 5 mechanisms supports the integration of CHWs into the care team. In particular, public and private 6 insurance payers could provide pathways to a sustainable financing structure. The Council believes 7 sustainable funding mechanisms that do not come out of that allocated physician payment should 8 be pursued. 9 10 RECOMMENDATIONS 11 12 The Council on Medical Service recommends that the following be adopted in lieu of Resolution 13 805-I-14 and that the remainder of the report be filed: 14 15 1. That our American Medical Association (AMA) amend Policy H-373.994 by addition of a new recommendation that specifies that the policy provisions for patient navigators are 16 17 also relevant for community health workers and other non-clinical public health workers. (Modify HOD Policy) 18 19 20 2. That our AMA encourage states and other appropriate stakeholders to establish that community health workers work under a strict protocol for any activity that relates to 21 22 clinical matters and that this protocol be developed by the physician-led health care team. 23 (New HOD Policy) 24 25 3. That our AMA encourage states and other appropriate stakeholders to conduct background checks on community health workers prior to the community health worker providing 26 services and take the background check results into appropriate consideration. (New HOD 27 28 Policy) 29 30 4. That our AMA encourage states and other appropriate stakeholders to develop a set of defined core competencies and skills of community health workers. (New HOD Policy) 31 32 33 5. That our AMA encourage states to support or establish the training, certification, and continuing education of community health workers that allow for multiple points of entry 34 35 into the profession. (New HOD Policy) 36 37 6. That our AMA encourage health insurers and other appropriate stakeholders to promote 38 sustainable funding mechanisms such as public and private insurance to finance 39 community health worker services and that this funding not be part of funds allocated for physician payment. (New HOD Policy) 40 41 42 7. That our AMA encourage states and other appropriate stakeholders to engage in collaborative efforts with community health workers and their professional organizations 43 in the development and implementation of policies related to community health workers. 44 (New HOD Policy) 45 46 47 8. That our AMA encourage states to consider privacy and liability issues related to the 48 inclusion of community health workers in the physician-led health care team. (New HOD 49 Policy)

Fiscal Note: Less than \$500.

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