

# Employment-Based Community Health Workers: A Model for Meeting Health-Related Social Needs in the Workplace.

## **ABSTRACT**

### **Introduction**

Health disparities due to race/ethnicity and lower socioeconomic (SES) status lead to poor health outcomes, excess medical costs, and premature death. They are also responsible for losses in labor market productivity and the rising cost of employer sponsored health insurance. For this reason, employers have an economic interest in reducing health disparities. Community health workers (CHWs) are frontline healthcare workers trained to help individuals navigate healthcare and social service systems. CHWs improve health outcomes and reduce disparities, especially when working with communities of lower SES and racial and ethnic minorities.

### **Methods**

We partnered with a community-based organization to implement and evaluate a pilot program from July 10, 2023 - June 30, 2024, that provided CHW-delivered services to a cohort (n=650) of lower socioeconomic status and minority employees at Oregon Health and Science University (OHSU). We used mixed methods to evaluate outcomes. CHWs collected data on service utilization, user demographics, and areas of need. OHSU collected survey data on employee health risk behaviors pre- and post- service use and conducted interviews with employees and the CHWs to explore program perceptions.

### **Results**

Utilization rate was 10%. 77% had at least one need met and would recommend the service to coworkers. Common needs were supplemental food resources, rental and utility assistance, hardship funds, and affordable housing. 1/3 of employees reported health behavior changes as a result of the CHW services, including efforts to improve their diet, exercise more, and reduce stress.

### **Conclusion**

The findings from this feasibility study will inform options for service expansion to a broader cohort at the employment site. Future research will examine employee turnover, attendance, and productivity before and after implementation of the CHW services. Ultimately, this model of CHW services may provide a mechanism for employers to address costly health disparities among employees.