



March 27, 2025

State of Oregon

*ATTN: Behavioral Health and Health Care Committee*

Barbara Roberts Human Services Building

500 Summer Street NE, E-65

Salem, OR 97301

RE: Support of HB 3916-1

Dear Chair Noose and Members of the Behavioral Health and Healthcare Committee,  
My name is Jennine Smart I am executive director and submitting testimony on behalf of the Oregon Community Health Workers Association, referred to as ORCHWA.

**About ORCHWA**

ORCHWA is a statewide professional association for community health workers in Oregon. Formally established 2011, ORCHWA was developed by CHWs to amplify cross system recognition of the workforce and the imperative role community health workers play in increasing individuals' access to the care and services they need to thrive.

**What are Community Health Workers**

Community health workers also referred to as CHWs, are commonly termed as frontline public health workers. However, are often understood in communities as the auntie, neighbor, community member, and/or trusted person who cares about the health and wellness of people. Working in both clinical and community settings, CHWs have added knowledge of how to navigate complex systems with community members and patients and hold an ongoing passion to support the self determination of individuals, families and community.

CHWs across Oregon often receive state approved training that furthers their success working in education, policy and advocacy, housing, food systems, on clinical care teams, and in dental settings. They provide health education and promotion, care coordinate and connection to resources, liaise between individuals and systems, among a long list of other services they provide. Simply put they are the often unseen, though awe-inspiring superheroes in our urban and rural communities.

## **Recognition of the Workforce**

For well over a decade, Oregon has led the charge in health care transformation and continues to strive toward creating a health care system that provides services accessible to all

Oregonians. Part of Oregon's success in healthcare transformation is connected to the recognition and inclusion of CHWs in the delivery of care. The data indicate CHWs are a cost-effective strategy that allow other providers to work at the top of their licensure and support provision of individual centered services. Their work creates a cost savings for health systems and taxpayers while improving long-term health, and access to care of individuals in urban and rural regions of the state.

For any workforce to be successful requires investment in training and professional development. House Bill 3916 is intended to expand the CHW workforce by creating funding to reduce barriers for CHWs receiving foundational training, professional development, and continuing education. In ORCHWA's 2024 CHW workforce assessment that included responses from all 36 counties in Oregon, data indicated community health workers typically receive low compensation for their work, meaning even basic training is cost prohibitive.

The over 2,000 CHWs in Oregon deserve opportunities to practice and grow in their profession and Oregonians deserve services from an adequately supported workforce. I urge you to support HB 3916 that will aid in the retention and stability of this essential frontline workforce, particularly at a time when our communities will greatly benefit from a workforce with a wide breadth of experience navigating individuals and communities through uncertainty.

Thank you for your support of the CHW workforce.



Jennine Smart, MSW  
Executive Director