



Community health workers (CHWs) are public health workers who connect community members to health and social services and advocate for people who have limited access to those resources. Often, they are from the communities they serve, and they improve the cultural competency of service delivery (California Healthcare Foundation 2023). CHWs work across various settings including hospitals, public health departments, and community-based organizations to improve access to care, develop health education, and strengthen ties between the community and health system (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2025).

CHWs typically start their roles with a mix of lived experience and formal and informal training (see Section 4, Kelly et al. 2021). Some employers conduct on-the-job training, some community colleges offer coursework to prepare CHWs, and community-based organizations sometimes offer training or other support for CHWs. In addition, some states and counties

provide CHW training, which may be tied to local certification requirements. Training approaches for CHWs emphasize community-based learning and practical skill development, and cover key themes such as communication skills, health education techniques, and strengthening a trainee's understanding of available local resources.

Registered apprenticeships, which offer paid hands-on employment in the community, are a small but growing approach to CHW training. This brief provides information and references to support exploration of CHW apprenticeships for state workforce agencies, health workforce employers, community-based organizations, and others. The brief begins with a description of registered apprenticeship programs in CHW including current trends in the numbers of apprentices, the benefits and challenges of implementing these programs, example programs, and resources for learning more.

Community Health Worker Apprenticeships

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What do CHW apprenticeship programs look like?

All registered apprenticeship programs are approved by the U.S. Department of Labor or a State Apprenticeship Agency and include paid employment, structured on-the-job learning with an experienced mentor, supplemental classroom instruction, and a nationally recognized credential (Apprenticeship USA 2025). For CHWs, apprenticeships are often 12 to 18 months in the first years of employment as a CHW, with classroom instruction provided by a community college. On completing the program, apprentices earn

“Registered Apprenticeship can help CHWs sharpen their skills, build confidence, and improve the quality of care they provide. It plays a vital role in their growth and success, empowering them to positively impact their communities’ health and well-being.”

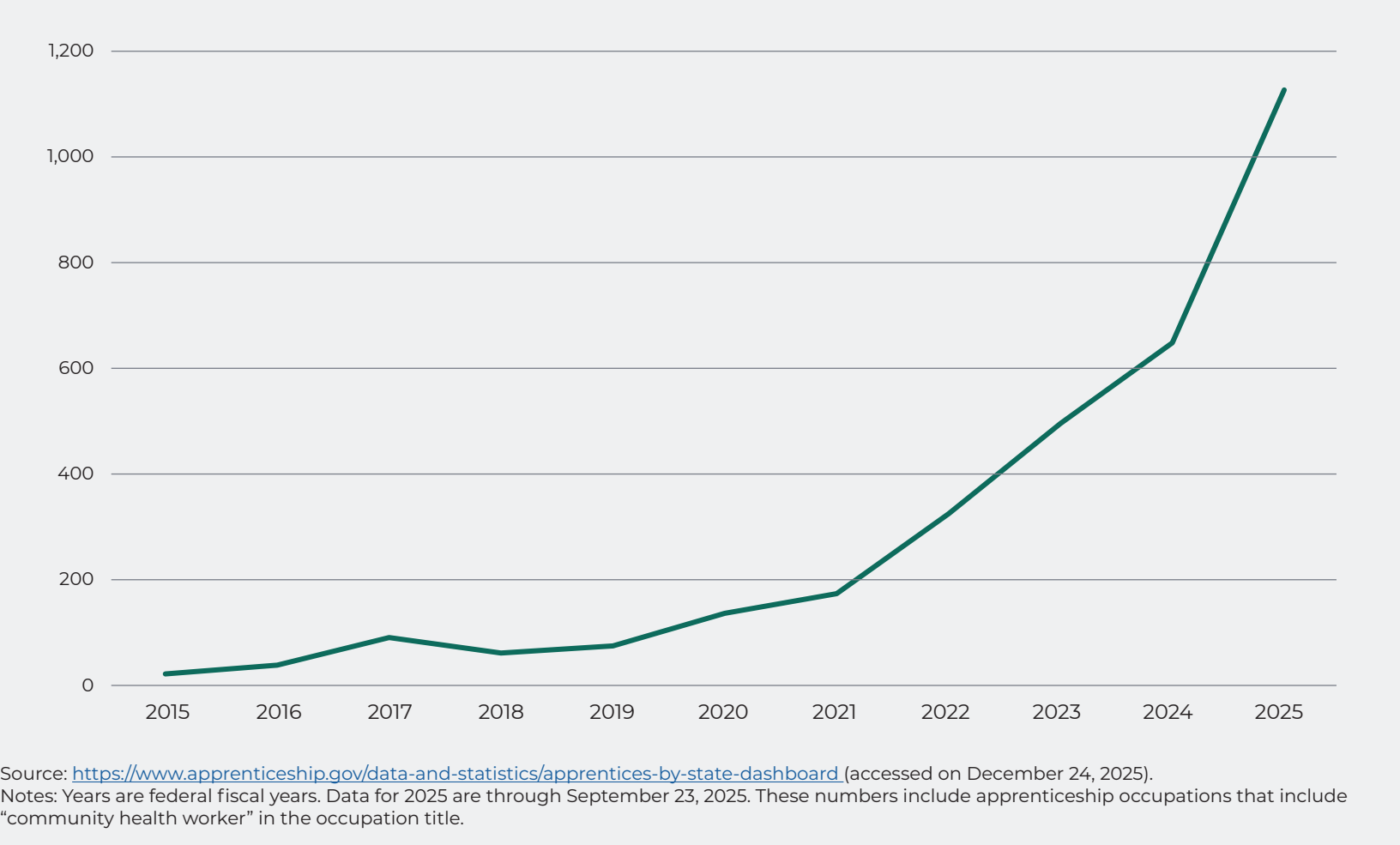
—[United Way of Wisconsin](#)

an industry-recognized credential issued by the U.S. Department of Labor, and, in states with certification programs, they often earn their state's certificate. Apprenticeships typically cover core competencies such as care coordination and health education (Health Resources & Services Administration, 2024).

Current trends in the number of registered apprenticeships for CHWs

Nationally, the number of CHW registered apprentices in nursing occupations grew from just 20 in 2015 to 1,126 in 2025 (Figure 1). The uptick in CHW apprenticeships began during the COVID-19 pandemic, when many low-resource communities faced a spike in demand for health information, healthcare, and social support (Peretz et al. 2020; Ruggiero and Krantz 2023). Despite the growing number of CHW apprentices, they make up a modest share (14 percent) of the roughly 7,800 new openings for CHWs each year (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2025). The states with the largest number of CHW apprentices are New York (221), California (105), Texas (88), and Rhode Island (55).

Figure 1. Number of CHW registered apprentices, 2015–2025



Benefits of CHW apprenticeships for employers, apprentices, and communities

CHW registered apprenticeships enhance the career pathways of apprentices, provide a structured approach for employers to develop their workforce, and provide trained CHWs to support communities facing public health challenges (Health Resources & Services Administration 2024; The Wellness Coalition 2025; Bates et al. 2018).

For CHWs, apprenticeships lead to enhanced skill development gained from hands-on practice. Apprenticeships allow CHWs to gain confidence in their field while working under a mentor in areas such as care management coordination, coaching, and home visits. In addition, apprenticeships lead to an industry-recognized credential and are paid, which helps reduce the financial burden of training.

For employers, training CHWs through a registered apprenticeship program helps ensure they gain the skills needed for their roles. Apprenticeships can lower recruitment costs and improve employee productivity and retention. One study found that for every dollar that an employer invests in a registered apprentice, they earned an average of \$1.44 (Kuehn et al. 2022). This return-on-investment estimate includes apprenticeships across multiple industries, including healthcare.

At the community level, CHW apprenticeships often train community members to work in their own communities, which helps to ensure that CHWs are representative of the communities they work in. Apprenticeships support CHWs to build community relationships, connections, and an understanding of the challenges communities face, helping them to better serve their community.

Challenges for CHW apprenticeship programs

CHW apprenticeship programs face three substantial challenges:

- 1. Sustainable funding can be a significant challenge for CHW apprenticeship programs.** Apprenticeship programs in the healthcare industry often rely on a mix of funding from grants, public investments from federal and state agencies, and employer contributions. These sources can be temporary or inconsistent, which can be a barrier to program development and sustainability (Bates et al. 2018). In some states, funding mechanisms exist only for highly specific CHW services, which can limit program scope (Schmit et al. 2021).
- 2. Partnerships between employers and educational institutions require administrative effort, staff capacity, and funding.** Registered apprenticeships require partnerships between CHW employers and educational institutions that provide classroom instruction. The administrative, logistical, and funding requirements for creating and sustaining these partnerships can be challenging.
- 3. Visionary leadership is needed to drive change.** Innovation in workforce training oftentimes requires a leader willing to drive change. If leaders do not exist at the state, employer, higher education, or community organization levels, systemic innovation can be dampened.

Apprenticeship program intermediaries help with the challenges of designing programs to meet state and federal requirements, coordinating partnerships between CHW employers and community colleges, finding funding resources, and providing leadership to support change management. These intermediaries serve as invaluable partners in program creation and delivery. For example, [The HAP Foundation](#) serves as an intermediary in Illinois, sponsoring a one-year federally registered CHW apprenticeship program.

In addition, the U.S. Department of Labor and state workforce agencies provide grants to help expand registered apprenticeship programs in healthcare and other industries. For example, in 2024, the Department of Labor awarded \$195 million under the Apprenticeship Building America initiative to nonprofits,

labor organizations, higher education institutions, and county governments to strengthen, modernize, and expand registered apprenticeship programs (U.S. Department of Labor 2024).

Examples of CHW registered apprenticeship programs

Although all registered apprenticeship programs include features such as paid employment and structured on-the-job learning with an experienced mentor, programs vary in their offerings and requirements.

In New York, the Division of Continuing Education and Workforce Development at Hostos Community College has operated a [CHW apprenticeship](#) at its Bronx campus since 2018. The program seeks to develop core competencies in advocacy, communication, people skills, planning, organization, cultural competency, health literacy, and outreach (Division of Continuing Education and Workforce Development and Public Works Partners 2023). The program focuses on incumbent workers who were already working for their apprenticeship employer as direct service professionals before the start of their apprenticeship. These workers are awarded up to 2,000 on-the-job training hours. Apprentices must complete 144 hours of classroom instruction during work hours. The CHW instruction, developed with employer input, focuses on patients' needs in the local community and social determinants of health. After completing the program, apprentices receive a certificate of completion and can apply for up to nine earned credits toward an associate degree. Resources for the Hostos apprenticeship program come from financial and in-kind contributions from the Capital One Foundation (which covers program tuition), Montefiore Hudson Valley Corporation (which covers books and supplies), and Hostos (staff time).²

In California, the [Homeless Prenatal Program](#) partners with [City College of San Francisco](#) to offer a 16-month apprenticeship program to former clients of the Homeless Prenatal Program and other members of the community. Apprentices provide community education, informal counseling, social support, and advocacy. On-the-job training includes working with clients, reception skills, client intake, database and other computer applications, information on local resources, outreach, and client-centered professional skills. Apprentices receive a minimum of 250 hours of classroom instruction, including 14 units of credit at City College of San Francisco. Apprentices receive a CHW

certificate and often become long-term staff at the Homeless Prenatal Program or move on to roles in public health.

In Rhode Island, the Parent Information Network, the largest employer of CHWs in the state, developed an 18-month apprenticeship program to train CHWs to work directly with people with opioid use disorder (Staatz 2021). CHW apprentices help people navigate insurance coverage and other resources, such as access to affordable housing and healthy food. The apprenticeship involves 2,000 to 3,000 hours of employment and on-the-job training at the network. The program initially started with incumbent workers who were already working for the network and then expanded to new apprentices who had not been previously employed with it. Apprentices develop a portfolio documenting their work and receive a CHW certificate on completing the program. The program was developed with funding by a grant to Rhode Island from the U.S. Department of Labor, the National Health Emergency Dislocated Worker Demonstration Grant to Address the Opioid Crises.³

Resources for learning more

To learn more about Mathematica's work on apprenticeships, go to [\(link to new landing page here\)](#).

The U.S. Department of Labor provides several [online resources](#) for learning more about registered apprenticeship programs in healthcare, including the following:

- A description of apprenticeship programs for CHWs and other healthcare occupations
- Links to competency based national frameworks for the course work and on-the-job learning requirements for CHWs and other healthcare occupations
- Links to healthcare industry intermediaries who can help in program development and support program delivery
- An invitation to join the Registered Apprenticeship Healthcare Community of Practice, a collaborative network of practitioners who share resources, best practices, data, research, and other information

In addition, state workforce agencies provide online information and resources on registered apprenticeship programs in their state.

Endnotes

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² For more information on the development of the Hostos CHW program, see <https://publicworkspartners.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/cedu-chw-apprenticeship-program-case-study.pdf>.

³ For more information on CHW apprenticeships in Rhode Island, see <https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/commhealthworkers/docs/chwapprenticeship.pdf>.

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