

## The Use of Community Health Workers in Community Health Centers

Marsha Regenstein, Jeongyoung Park, Nicholas Chong, and Chinelo Onyilofo

### OBJECTIVE

Until 2016, community health centers (CHCs) reported community health workers (CHWs) as part of their overall enabling services workforce, making analyses of CHW use over time infeasible in the annual Uniform Data System (UDS). We examined changes in the CHW workforce among CHCs from 2016 to 2018 and factors associated with use of CHWs.

### RESEARCH DESIGN, SUBJECTS, MEASURES

The Two-Part model estimated separate effects for probability of using any CHW and extent of CHW Full-Time Equivalent (FTEs) reported in those CHCs, using a total of 4,102 CHC-year observations from 2016 to 2018. To estimate the extent to which increases in CHW workforce are attributable to real growth or rather are a consequence of a change in reporting category, we also conducted a Difference-in-Differences analysis to compare non-CHW enabling services FTEs between CHCs with and without CHWs prior to (2013-2015) and after (2016-2018) the reporting change in 2016.

### RESULTS

The rate of CHCs that employed CHWs rose from 20.04% in 2016 to 28.34% in 2018, while average FTEs stayed relatively flat (3.32 FTEs). Size (larger CHCs) and grant funding (less reliant on federal but more reliant on private funding) were significant factors associated with CHW use. However, we found that a substantial portion of this growth was attributable to a change in UDS reporting categories.

### CONCLUSIONS

While we do not address the reasons why CHCs have been slow to use CHWs, our results point to substantial financial barriers associated with CHCs' expanding the use of CHWs.

**Key Words:** community health center, community health worker