



Health Care Availability & Accessibility Committee
Position on HB3840/HB5548
January 9, 2021

The American Lung Association applauds Representative Camille Lilly, Senator Mattie Hunter and all members of the Illinois Legislative Black Caucus for their recognition of the important role of Community Health Workers (CHWs) in the effective management of chronic conditions, like asthma. CHWs play an essential role in the delivery of optimal home-based asthma services. CHWs also bridge cultural and language barriers, expand access to healthcare coverage and quality care, and improve overall health outcomes.

The Lung Association works on behalf of the 33 million Americans living with lung diseases, including asthma, lung cancer and COPD. During the present times of combatting COVID-19, an infection that aggressively attacks the lungs, our work is even more critical.

Illinois has seen some positive trends in asthma in recent years, however these gains have not been evident in all groups. Asthma prevalence has remained stable since 2011ⁱ in addition to overall asthma mortalityⁱⁱ, and there have been declines in emergency department (ED) visits and hospitalizations from 2016 to 2019.ⁱⁱⁱ Despite this progress, asthma disparities persist. Asthma prevalence in women is nearly two times higher than in males (10.4% vs. 6.2%), it is highest among non-Hispanic Black Illinoisans (10.8%) and low-income individuals (13.5% among those making under \$15,000 per year). Mortality disparities are appalling: the rate is four times higher for Black Illinoisans compared to those who are white (30.1 vs. 7.6 per 1,000,000).ⁱⁱ

We strongly support the provision of HB3840/HB5548 that allows for CHW services to be reimbursable by the state medical assistance program as a way to expand access to the vital services CHWs provide to some of the highest risk patients. A CHW from a patient's neighborhood or a CHW with a shared cultural background can serve as a uniquely trusted link between the clinical and social resources in their community. CHWs may better understand the language, cultural norms, health perspectives and personal practices of those they serve. This shared sense of community may encourage a family to be more receptive to the asthma education delivered by a CHW who resides in their community.

The Lung Association has been completing asthma home assessments with CHWs for the past 5 years. To date, our CHWs have provided over 170 children with asthma and their families with in-home lung health education and trigger-reducing and environmentally appropriate products, such as green cleaners, bed and pillow covers, and HEPA air cleaners. At the start of the program, on average, the children had uncontrolled asthma and were at risk of missed school days, hospitalizations, and emergency department (ED) visits. After 12 months, the average child's asthma had been controlled. The work of CHWs created a safer and healthier home environment for these children and their families.

Another prime example of the value of CHWs to positive public health outcomes in our state is the Sinai Urban Health Institute (SUHI)'s (the research arm of Sinai Health System) Asthma CarePartners (ACP) initiative, a comprehensive home-based asthma program in which CHWs provide environmental assessments and education on asthma self-management and environmental triggers to over 1,000 children and adults with asthma mostly on Chicago's



south and west sides. SUHI has conducted extensive research on CHW home-based asthma interventions for children since its early pilot program began more than 20 years ago.^{iv} Data show that participants in ACP have seen urgent care clinic and ED visits decrease on average by 80 percent and 76 percent, respectively. Hospitalizations have been similarly reduced by more than 82 percent. On average, the program increases a participant's asthma symptom-free days by 99 days per year.^{iv}

Investing in CHWs to keep asthma patients out of the hospital will have a positive impact on our state's bottom-line. The average cost of an ED visit for children and adults is \$691, while hospitalizations for children cost on \$7,897 and \$9,261 for adults.^{iv} Preventing these exorbitant medical costs by utilizing CHWs to educate and empower Illinoisans with asthma will not only save our state money, it will improve the quality of life of those affected by this disease.

On behalf of the more than 1 million adults and children with asthma in Illinois, we urge lawmakers to support Section 5-20 of HB3840/HB5548 to improve asthma outcomes in our state.

ⁱ Illinois Department of Public Health. Asthma Trends BRFSS 2011-2017. Available at <http://www.dph.illinois.gov/sites/default/files/publications/122018ohpmbfrfsstrendscombined.pdf>. Accessed January 7, 2021.

ⁱⁱ U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. Underlying Cause of Death 1999-2008 on CDC WONDER Online Database. 2012. Accessed January 7, 2021.

ⁱⁱⁱ Discharge Data; Office of Policy, Planning and Statistics; Illinois Department of Public Health, 2016-2019.

^{iv} American Hospital Association. Sinai Health System – Asthma CarePartners (ACP) Program. 2013. Available at <https://www.aha.org/case-studies/2013-01-02-sinai-health-system-asthma-carepartners-acp-program>. Accessed January 7, 2021.