

Written by Dave Blanchette
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New Steps Will Help Expand Access and Quality of Healthcare

CHICAGO – Governor Pat Quinn today signed a law to expand health and wellness services in communities throughout Illinois. The law provides certification standards for community health workers to help bridge a vital link between healthcare providers and the unique needs of Illinois' communities. Today's action is part of Governor Quinn's agenda to protect and improve the health of the people of Illinois.

"Community health workers are trusted frontline public health professionals who have a close understanding of their communities' needs," Governor Quinn said. "This new law recognizes the vital role these professionals play in the health care system, and helps ensure the best possible delivery and quality of services in neighborhoods across our state."

"With more people now able to access healthcare under the Affordable Care Act, if workforce shortages are not addressed, it could limit access to services and quality healthcare for all Illinoisans," Illinois Department of Public Health Director Dr. LaMar Hasbrouck said. "Illinois is already experiencing workforce shortages with many safety net and rural health providers being challenged to deliver adequate care for those in their communities. Community health workers can help fill this void, connect people to services and higher-level health providers, which can ultimately increase the health of the state."

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House Bill 5412, sponsored by State Representative Robyn Gabel (D-Evanston) and State Senator David Koehler (D-Peoria), defines “community health worker” and creates the Illinois Community Health Worker Advisory Board to recommend certification requirements for these healthcare professionals to ensure quality care for Illinois’ residents. This 15-member volunteer board comprised of current community health workers, physicians, nurses and other healthcare professionals will recommend rules to standardize the criteria and process to become a certified community health worker. These workers do not provide any direct care or treatment that requires a license, but can be invaluable for linking specific health and wellness services to residents of individual communities.

The legislation was recommended in the Illinois Alliance for Health Innovation Plan in January. The Alliance was a state-led group of health policy leaders, providers, insurers and stakeholders assembled by the administration of Governor Quinn. The plan recognized the important contribution community health workers make to our healthcare system and recommended the legislation to ensure these workers all meet the same standards to provide the best services to Illinois residents. The law is effective immediately.

“This new law will help people in the community by creating a path for these workers to become respected members of the healthcare team,” Representative Gabel said. “Their role is critical because they help implement the patient’s healthcare plan, and help patients better understand their conditions to achieve a path of good health.”

“Community health workers have become an increasingly important part of our healthcare system,” Senator Koehler said. “It will help both the people working in these important jobs and the public to give community health workers legal recognition and to establish training requirements.”

Governor Quinn is committed to helping to ensure all people have access to quality healthcare in Illinois, especially those in underserved communities.

In May Governor Quinn announced a \$14.5 million investment to build and renovate community health centers to help meet the healthcare demand in underserved communities throughout Illinois. A total of \$30.5 million in funding from Governor Quinn’s Illinois Jobs Now! program has been distributed since 2011 to community health centers. These centers fill a void by providing care for those whom other providers often do not serve, including the low income, uninsured or homeless; or those with HIV/AIDS, substance abuse problems or special medical

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needs.

The Governor also signed The Community Health Center Construction Act in 2009 to provide funding to repair outdated buildings, convert vacant commercial space, build new health center facilities and purchase new equipment for additional healthcare services.

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