



MEMORANDUM

To: Jessica Johnson, Chair,
SURG Subcommittee #1 - Prevention

Subject: Recommendation to Enhance Credentialing, Legitimacy, and Reimbursement for Community Health Workers (CHWs) and Peer Recovery Support Specialists (PRSS) in Nevada

Introduction This memo outlines a strategic recommendation to address significant barriers faced by Community Health Workers (CHWs) and Peer Recovery Support Specialists (PRSS) in Nevada. These barriers, particularly regarding credentialing, legitimacy, and reimbursement, undermine the effectiveness and sustainability of these critical healthcare roles. The recommendation is supported by current billing practices, reimbursement data, and the career outlook for these professions.

Recommendation

- **Develop and Implement a Robust Credentialing Framework:** Establish a state-recognized credentialing system for CHWs and PRSSs, aligned with national standards. This will enhance the legitimacy of these professions and facilitate their integration into the healthcare system.
- **Increase Medicaid Reimbursement Rates:** Align reimbursement rates with national averages, increasing the rates for CHW/PRSSs services by at least 10% and doubling the allowable billable hours per month. This adjustment would result in fairer compensation and incentivize the use of CHWs in more healthcare settings.
- **Utilize Legislative Momentum:** Submit a Bill Draft Request (BDR) to leverage the momentum from previous legislative sessions, focusing on the inclusion of CHWs and PRSSs in Medicaid reimbursement policies and ensuring parity in recognition with other healthcare professionals.
- **Establish a Task Force to Address Historical Barriers:** Form a task force to identify and address past regulatory challenges that have hindered the proper credentialing and reimbursement of CHWs and PRSSs. The task force should include Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) and representatives from key stakeholder groups.
- **Ensure Medicaid Follow-Through:** *BEFORE* the session, contact and coordinate this effort with DHCFP (Medicaid). Through cooperation with Medicaid, develop a detailed implementation plan. The plan should outline steps for increasing reimbursement rates, credentialing, and accountability measures.
- **Promote Equity and Accessibility:** Ensure that cultural competency guides all discussions about addressing equity. Consult with entities with expertise in addressing health disparities *before* any proposal is proffered. Design credentialing and reimbursement policies that advance racial and health equity. This will support a more inclusive healthcare workforce and ensure that underserved communities benefit from the services provided by CHWs and PRSSs, guided by SMEs representative of the community served.

Background CHWs and PRSSs are vital to improving healthcare outcomes, particularly in underserved communities. Despite their importance, these professions have historically struggled with inadequate credentialing processes, lack of recognition, and insufficient reimbursement. These challenges have hindered their integration into the healthcare system and limited their impact (Nevada Division of Public and Behavioral Health, 2023).

In Nevada, both CHWs and PRSSs are regulated, trained, and compensated in ways that reflect their critical roles in public health and recovery support, though challenges remain in fully integrating these professionals into the healthcare system (Nevada Certification Board, 2023).

Current Billing Data Overview Based on national billing practices, here is an overview of reimbursement rates for CHWs and PRSSs:

Community Health Workers (CHWs):

- **Commonly Billed Codes:** G9001, G9002, T1016, T1027, 98960, 98961-98962
- **Estimated Annual Reimbursement:** \$108,750,000 for a population of 50,000 patients (CMS Data Navigator, 2023)
- **Primary Providers:** Primary Care Providers, Community Health Centers, Social Workers, Nurse Educators
- **Services Provided:** Care coordination, case management, family training, patient self-management education

Peer Recovery Support Specialists (PRSS):

- **Commonly Billed Codes:** H0038, H0046, H2015, H2016
- **Estimated Annual Reimbursement:** \$230,000,000 for a population of 50,000 patients (CMS Data Navigator, 2023)
- **Primary Providers:** Behavioral Health Agencies, Certified Peer Support Specialists, Mental Health Providers
- **Services Provided:** Peer mentoring, advocacy, comprehensive community support, intensive daily support services

Career Outlook The career outlook for both CHWs and PRSSs in Nevada and across the U.S. is promising, driven by growing recognition of their roles in improving public health outcomes and supporting recovery from addiction:

Community Health Workers (CHWs):

- **Demand Growth:** The demand for CHWs is expected to increase significantly due to their role in bridging gaps in healthcare access, particularly in underserved communities (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023).
- **Job Outlook:** Employment for CHWs is projected to grow by 13% from 2022 to 2032, faster than the average for all occupations (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023).

- **Work Environment:** CHWs often work in community settings, public health organizations, hospitals, and non-profits, with increasing integration into healthcare teams.
- **Compensation:** In Nevada, CHWs typically earn between \$30,000 and \$50,000 annually, depending on experience, location, and employer (Nevada Certification Board, 2023).

Peer Recovery Support Specialists (PRSS):

- **Demand Growth:** The need for PRSSs has risen sharply due to the ongoing opioid crisis and the growing emphasis on peer-led interventions in behavioral health (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2023).
- **Job Outlook:** The broader category, including PRSSs, is expected to see a 23% growth rate from 2022 to 2032, much faster than average (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023).
- **Work Environment:** PRSSs work in a variety of settings, including treatment facilities, hospitals, and community-based organizations, providing peer support based on lived experience.
- **Compensation:** In Nevada, PRSSs typically earn between \$30,000 and \$55,000 annually, with potential for higher earnings in high-demand areas (Nevada Certification Board, 2023).

Regulation and Training in Nevada

- **CHWs:**
 - **Regulation:** CHW certification in Nevada is voluntary but encouraged. The Nevada Certification Board (NCB) offers certification, which requires completing an approved training program and meeting experience requirements (Nevada Certification Board, 2023).
 - **Training:** Training programs cover key competencies, such as communication, cultural competence, health education, and service coordination (Nevada Division of Public and Behavioral Health, 2023).
- **PRSSs:**
 - **Regulation:** PRSSs must be certified in Nevada, requiring state-approved training, an exam, and proof of lived experience in recovery (Nevada Certification Board, 2023).
 - **Training:** Training includes recovery support techniques, ethics, communication skills, and crisis management, with ongoing education required to maintain certification (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2023).

Key Findings

- **Disparities in Reimbursement:** PRSS services command higher reimbursement rates due to the more intensive and specialized nature of their services. However, CHW services, which are integral to preventive care and health education, are under-reimbursed, highlighting the need for better alignment in compensation (CMS Data Navigator, 2023).
- **Underutilization of CHW Services:** CHWs are underutilized in billing, which limits their financial sustainability and broader integration into care teams. Enhancing their credentialing and legitimacy could increase their utilization (Nevada Division of Public and Behavioral Health, 2023).
- **Critical Role in Healthcare Outcomes:** Both CHWs and PRSSs are crucial for improving healthcare outcomes, particularly in underserved populations. Enhancing their reimbursement and credentialing is essential for stabilizing and sustaining these roles (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2023)

Recommendation

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Conclusion Implementing these recommendations will strengthen the role of CHWs and PRSSs in Nevada's healthcare system, ensuring that they are adequately compensated and recognized for their contributions. By addressing the disparities in reimbursement and enhancing credentialing, Nevada can improve healthcare outcomes, particularly in underserved communities, while promoting equity and sustainability in these critical professions.

For questions or further information contact:

Trey Delap, MA, EMBA
trey@groupsixpartners.com
 702-772-9735