

*Massachusetts  
Association of  
Community  
Health  
Workers*

*The  
Community  
Health Worker  
Initiative  
of Boston*

**POLICY BRIEF Part 2**  
On Credentialing

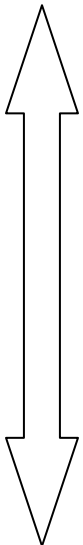
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**Background:** Community health worker (CHW) workforce development initiatives, including a possible CHW credential have recently received attention across Massachusetts. In an effort to clarify the terminology used, the Massachusetts Association of Community Health Workers and the Community Health Worker Initiative of Boston have collaborated to produce the information below to facilitate conversations utilizing a common language.

The term **credential** is used broadly to signify an official document. In this case it would represent an official document recognized statewide used to establish CHWs have obtained certain skills, knowledge, abilities and experience needed to effectively perform CHW job functions.

- **Overview of Terms:** Defined below are three major types of credentialing --registration, certification, and licensing-- ordered from least to most restrictive.<sup>1</sup> To clarify, the term ‘certification’ is used only for the specific type of credentialing.

Least Restrictive



- **Registration:** Registration is the least restrictive form of regulation, usually requiring individuals to file their names, addresses, and qualifications with a government agency before practicing their occupation. It may include a filing fee. Registration provides a ‘title’ more than anything else because individuals do not have to pass examinations to be registered.
- **Certification:** Certification is sometimes referred to as “title control.” It may be offered by a government body or by a profession (non-governmental organization, or NGO). Certifications are granted to individuals who have met predetermined qualifications set by the certification agency within a profession. A certification is a formal recognition of professional or technical competence. Certification is divided into two broad domains: minimum competency standards and advanced knowledge standards. Minimum competency standards are used to represent what is deemed acceptable for an entry-level practitioner. Advanced knowledge standards are used to signal advanced knowledge and skill within a profession. There are often specialization areas within occupations. Benefits *may* include third party payment of services, enhanced funding streams and improved status and respect among human service and health care providers.
- **Licensure:** The term licensure is often referred to as “practice control” – a person cannot legally perform the occupation without the appropriate license. While protection of the public is a core reason for licensure, professional groups have also

Most Restrictive

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Mahlman, R. & Austin, J. *Evaluating Credentialing Systems: Implications for Career-Technical Educators*. Commissioned paper for the National Skills Standards Board. 2002.

benefited, including (1) payment of services by third-party payers, (2) enhanced economic benefits for practitioners, (3) increased status, (4) protection of the reputation of the profession, and (5) symbolic respectability.

- **CHW recommendations\***: While it remains unclear if CHWs in the Commonwealth believe that credentialing the CHW workforce is beneficial and necessary, there are some core philosophies that CHWs can agree upon when discussing the credentialing issue.
  - Training opportunities for CHWs need to be affordable, community-based and available in all regions of the state. This training should be in place before any credential is developed.
  - The credential, if developed, needs to be a less restrictive model so barriers are not created that will change the composition or scope of services of the workforce.
  - The credential, if developed, should not be mandatory for hire by an employer. CHWs are primarily hired because of their connections to and shared experiences with the community. A CHW credential should represent enhanced expertise.
  - CHWs request that all proposed credentialing models provide details of how credentialing will directly lead to increased wages and 3<sup>rd</sup> party reimbursement in a sustainable manner. While a few states have chosen to have a credential available for CHWs, none have yet to see these benefits.

*\* The above CHW recommendations taken from MACHW regional meetings held in Boston, Lowell and Worcester.*

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