

## COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKER ADVISORY BODY MEETING

### DRAFT Meeting Minutes

September 4, 2025 | 10:00 – 11:00 a.m.

[Zoom Meeting Recording](#)

#### ATTENDANCE

##### BY ELECTRONIC DEVICE:

Rachel Rusnak, OHS (Chair)  
Mildred Landock  
Erika Lynch

Nilda Paris  
Fernando Morales  
Dr. Stephan Fran Thung

Derricia Parker  
Cynthia Jean-Mary

##### IN PERSON:

N/A

##### ABSENT:

Laura Morris  
Kim Barry

Adriana Rojas  
Milagrosa Seguinot

Liza Estevez

##### OTHER PARTICIPANTS:

Heather Poole-LaFountain  
(YWCA)

Kari Sullivan-Custer (CSDE)  
Elizabeth Conklin (DPH)

#### WELCOME AND CALL TO ORDER

Rachel Rusnak called the CHWAB meeting to order at approximately 10:02 a.m. A roll call determined that a quorum was not present.

#### PUBLIC COMMENT

Rachel opened the meeting for public comments. No comments were offered, and no remarks were submitted via chat.

#### APPROVAL OF June 5, 2025, MINUTES

Approval of prior minutes was postponed due to lack of quorum.

#### YWCA NEW BRITAIN – YOUTH CHW TRAINING PROGRAM

Rachel introduced Heather Poole-LaFountain, CHW Supervisor for the Youth Development Department at YWCA of New Britain, to present on the Youth CHW Training Program. Heather provided an overview of the program, which prepares youth for CHW roles through structured coursework, community engagement, and skill-building experiences. She described the program's development since 2020 and its continued expansion through multiple funding sources and partnerships. Heather highlighted several core elements of the youth CHW model, including:

- Completion of a 90-hour CHW course, followed by a 50-hour PhotoVoice internship, and a 1,000-hour fieldwork requirement.
- Youth participation in community outreach efforts focused on vaccine equity, mental health, environmental health, and civic engagement.
- Program activities such as tabling events, community surveys, legislative advocacy, and public-education campaigns.
- Collaborations with partners including the Connecticut Health Foundation, Reinvestment Fund, CSDE, American Academy of Pediatrics, and Aurora Foundation.
- Integration of a government liaison to support youth involvement in legislative processes and policy-related work.

Heather also discussed several challenges faced by the program, including:

- Limited placement opportunities for youth under 18 due to age requirements.
- The need for sustainable funding to support course fees and youth stipends.
- Scheduling barriers during after-school program hours.
- Difficulties securing internship opportunities for recent high-school graduates.

Heather concluded her presentation by emphasizing the program's successes and the strong partnerships that make the youth CHW pathway possible. She shared examples of youth-led initiatives, such as park revitalization efforts, vaccine-equity education, and community safety projects.

Rachel opened the floor for comments and questions. Eve Berry and Fernando Morales provided additional context regarding the program's origins and the longstanding collaboration between the YWCA and the Southwestern AHEC. A brief discussion followed.

### **CT STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION – ATTENDANCE & LEAP PROGRAM**

Rachel introduced Kari Sullivan-Custer, Education Consultant with the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), to Present on statewide attendance trends and the Learner Engagement and Attendance program (LEAP). Kari Provided an overview of chronic absenteeism in Connecticut, noting that chronic absence is defined as missing 10% or more of the school year for any reason and remains elevated following the COVID-19 pandemic. She emphasized the public health and academic impacts of persistent absenteeism and explained how CSDE is working to support districts and families through targeted engagement strategies.

Kari described LEAP as a relational home-visiting model designed to build trust with families, identify barriers to attendance, and connect students to appropriate school or community resources. She shared that LEAP has conducted more than 78,000 home visits to date, reaching over 66,00 students statewide. Early outcomes show improvements in attendance, school engagement, and family-school relationships.

Kari highlighted several tools and supports available through CSDE, including guidance on illness and school attendance, family engagement strategies, and the monthly LEAP 101 training sessions, which are open to CHWs and community partners. These virtual sessions provide foundational information on the LEAP model and best practices for attendance outreach.

A brief discussion followed, including questions about collaboration with CHWs and how community partners may engage with ongoing LEAP efforts.

### **CHW BACK-TO-SCHOOL SERIES**

OHS will launch a new free virtual webinar series open to CHW's, CHW employers, instructors, and community partners. Planned topics include:

- Overview of CHW role and scope.
- Communication skills.
- Cultural competency and humility.
- Trauma-informed CHW practices.

Sessions will count toward continuing education hours. Registration links will be shared once finalized.

### **CT DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH UPDATE**

DPH shared several upcoming CHW-related opportunities:

- October virtual in-service on professional burnout (eligible for CE hours/credits)
- Launch of national Alzheimer's and brain-health modules for CHW's, developed in collaboration with ASTHO, and informed by Connecticut feedback.
- Ongoing learning collaboration opportunities for federally qualified health centers focusing on cardiovascular health and CHW-supported screening.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS & QUESTIONS**

Fernando Morales announced that planning is underway for the statewide CHW Summit, tentatively scheduled for November 6, 2025, at the Sheraton Hartford South. A save the date will be shared soon.

**NEXT STEPS & MEETING ADJOURNMENT**

Chair Rusnak announced the next meeting is December 4, 2025. A motion to adjourn was made by Fernando Morales and seconded by Cynthia Jean-Mary. The meeting adjourned at approximately 11:00 am.

Statutory Citation: C.G.S. §20-195sss

**UPCOMING MEETING:**

December 4, 2025