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Contact:

Betty St. Hilaire

Co-Chair of Maine Community Health Worker Initiative's Advisory Committee

betty.Sthilaire@mainegeneral.org

207-626-7340

**FIRST-EVER COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKER AWARENESS EVENT AT
THE STATE HOUSE SHINES SPOTLIGHT ON VITAL ROLE**

AUGUSTA, Maine – The Maine Community Health Workers Initiative (MECHWI) hosted the first-ever Community Health Worker Awareness Week event Thursday, August 31, in the Maine State House Hall of Flags.

The event aimed at advocating for and highlighting the pivotal role of community health workers (CHWs) in Maine's health care system.

Bridgette Gemelli, CHW capacity building coordinator at the MECHWI, said during her speech at the event, "CHWs have been doing this work for decades in our communities. The work that is being done by CHWs provides a significant impact on health outcomes."

A recent study conducted by the University of Maine found that CHWs are highly skilled, well-trained profession working in every Maine county. They provide critical services, such as advocacy, coaching and social support, outreach, capacity building, care coordination, and culturally appropriate health information.

Despite their effectiveness in improving the health of diverse communities across the state, the study also found that CHWs lack adequate compensation and professional recognition and experience high rates of turnover.

With the support and participation of esteemed leaders and health care professionals, this event underscored the contributions made by CHWs in bridging gaps in health care access,

improving the overall well-being of Maine communities, and amplifying the need for state policies that promote workforce development and sustainability.

To meet the needs of the CHW workforce, MCD Global Health, a public health nonprofit based in Maine that partners with the MECHWI, offers virtual training to new and experienced CHWs, including CHW Core Competency Training.

Christopher Schwabe, Ph.D., president and CEO of MCD Global Health, said, “It was a great pleasure to meet CHWs from Maine who have benefited from the Core Competency Training offered by MCD Global Health and hear how this training has positively impacted their ability to perform their essential frontline public health responsibilities.”

The event featured community organization networking, informative presentations, and success stories that shed light on how CHWs are catalysts for positive changes in the state.

Those who participated represented several Maine organizations, including Governor Janet Mills, the University of Maine, Mercy Hospital, Maine General, New Mainer’s Public Health Initiative, Maine Medical Center, MCD Global Health, Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and many others.

Dr. Puthiery Va, director of the Maine CDC, said, “Thank you for all the work that you do. You are real friends with public health; you are out there as connectors for the community.”

Allison MacMillian, a CHW from MaineGeneral, said, “Sometimes, [CHWs] are an ear to listen and a shoulder to cry on, and their eyes light up when they know we are there to support them.”

Katherine Darling, Ph.D., a professor of sociology at the University of Maine, said, “It has been a privilege to work with the MECHWI over the past three years. It has been powerful to see how it has materialized over the years.”

The results of the CHW Awareness Week event showcase the importance of the profession in Maine and beyond. The MECHWI is committed to strengthening the health care system and fostering healthier communities.

About the Maine Community Health Worker Initiative

The Maine Community Health Worker Initiative (MECHWI), a partner program within MCD Global Health, is working to expand the important work that is being done by CHWs throughout Maine. With the support of MCD, the initiative has a strong foundation to build and sustain a vibrant CHW profession. Learn more about MECHWI at <https://www.mechw.org/>.

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