

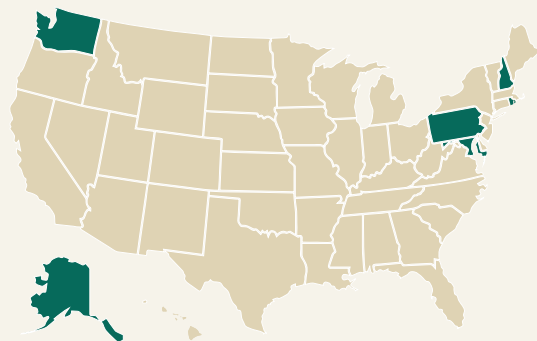
Strategy Spotlight

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Registered Apprenticeships for Community Health Workers and Dually Certified Peer Recovery Specialist-Community Health Workers

Study background

This strategy spotlight is part of a study funded by the U.S. Department of Labor's Chief Evaluation Office, and conducted in collaboration with the Office of Policy Development and Research within the Employment and Training Administration (ETA). The study explores the implementation of the National Health Emergency (NHE) Dislocated Worker Demonstration Grants to Address the Opioid crisis, which six states received in 2018. These grants, funded by ETA's Office of Workforce Investment (OWI), encouraged states to test innovative approaches to address the economic and workforce-related impacts of the opioid epidemic.



More information about the evaluation of the NHE demonstration grants including a literature review and final report from the implementation study is available here: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/oasp/evaluation/topic-areas/substance-use-disorder-work>

Community health workers (CHWs) and peer recovery specialists (PRSs) can play an important role in meeting the health care needs of people with opioid use disorder. Registered apprenticeship programs, an “earn while you learn” approach, can help build a certified workforce of CHWs and PRSs by providing classroom and on-the-job training. This strategy spotlight highlights an innovative effort, funded through a National Health Emergency (NHE) Dislocated Worker Demonstration Grant to Address the Opioid Crisis to the state of Rhode Island, to develop registered apprenticeships for CHWs and dually certified PRS–CHWs.

Implementation context

Apprenticeship RI, an initiative of Building Futures, develops registered apprenticeships in partnership with the Rhode Island Department of Labor.¹ With funds from the NHE demonstration grant, Building Futures, the subgrantee, worked with two partners to develop registered apprenticeship programs for two occupations that could help address the opioid crisis: CHWs and dually certified PRS–CHWs.

Program staff from Apprenticeship RI noted the great need for CHWs to work directly with people with opioid use disorder. CHWs' work can vary substantially: for example, some focus on helping people navigate insurance coverage, while others focus on addressing the social determinants of health, such as accessing affordable housing and healthy food. Through the grant, Apprenticeship RI sought to standardize training and increase the pipeline of qualified CHWs and PRS-CHWs using registered apprenticeships.

Key intervention components


Apprenticeship RI provided grant funds for the development of two registered apprenticeship programs:

/ [Rhode Island Parent Information Network \(RIPIN\)](#)—the largest employer of CHWs in the state created the state’s first CHW registered apprenticeship program. The 18-month registered apprenticeship enables CHWs to complete the hours needed for certification while earning income and receiving on-the-job training through RIPIN, the employer of all apprentices in this program. In addition to gaining the field hours needed for certification, this time on the job helps CHWs develop a portfolio documenting their work, which is also a certification requirement. The apprenticeship lasts 2,000 – 3,000 hours, and 43 apprentices have participated in the program as of September 2021.

/ [Parent Support Network](#) developed the requirements for the new PRS-CHW apprenticeship. The 2,000-hour apprenticeship includes 50 hours of classroom training for people already trained as PRSs, with the remainder as structured on-the-job learning at Parent Support Network or one of seven local community-based organizations that serve as employer partners. Supervisors at the organizations structure time on the job to facilitate learning, with technical assistance from Apprenticeship RI. Apprenticeship RI worked with the RI Department of Health to ensure the PRS-CHW apprenticeship aligns with the RI Certification Board requirements.

Potential elements for success

Both partners have become champions of the registered apprenticeship model and planned to continue their apprenticeship programs when grant funding ends. Interview respondents at Apprenticeship RI attributed this success to several factors:

 **Starting with incumbent workers** enabled Apprenticeship RI and its partners to introduce employers to the apprenticeship model and first train employees who were determined to be in need of additional competencies. The

“I often encourage new employers to start with incumbent workers to beta test the apprenticeship model. Then they’ll likely want to expand it for new incoming employees.”

—Interview respondent

partners then encouraged employers to expand the program to hire new apprentices not previously employed with their agency.



Buy-in and commitment of partners.

Apprenticeship RI noted both partners have embraced the apprenticeship model and champion its effectiveness as a workforce development strategy. Nine employers now sponsor apprenticeships, including RIPIN and Parent Support Network, and the partners continue to build relationships with new employers.



Two respondents cited **the apprenticeship for dual PRS-CHWs** as successful because the two careers are highly interrelated and

participants valued this joint training. Although skill sets for the two professions overlap to some extent, required trainings for them teach complementary skills. The program started with PRSs who wanted to become certified as CHWs; it has now expanded to include CHWs with their own lived experience with substance use disorder who want to become certified as PRSs. Parent Support Network had enrolled 53 dual PRS-CHW apprentices across different cohorts as of September 2021, and 87 percent had completed the apprenticeship or were still actively enrolled, which was a higher retention rate than anticipated.

Implementation challenges and strategies

Respondents noted that, in sectors outside of construction, employers generally are unfamiliar with the registered apprenticeship model. In the first year of the NHE demonstration grant, Apprenticeship RI focused on providing technical assistance to employers to develop and implement registered apprenticeship. The success of the first cohort of apprentices

provided a launch pad for recruiting other employers into the program, as employers became more familiar with the apprenticeship model. One interview respondent stated, "After that first cohort, it paved the way for the rest of the grant."

Read more

<http://www.bfri.org/2020octnews-ra-address-opioids-crisis/>

Endnotes

¹ Over the past five years, Building Futures, using its experience developing registered apprenticeships in the construction industry, has expanded into other sectors, including health care, information technology, advanced manufacturing, marine trades, and agriculture/plant-based industries. For more information, please see <https://www.bfri.org/>.

This Spotlight is part of a four-part series on innovative employment and training interventions to address the opioid crisis:

- Embedding employment services in an opioid treatment facility
- Adapting work readiness training for people in recovery
- Registered apprenticeships for community health workers and dually certified peer recovery specialist-community health workers
- Supporting employers using the Project Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes (ECHO) model ▲



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