



## Community Health Innovations of Rhode Island News

*Working for Equity through Community Driven Efforts*

chi-ri.org

### Celebration!



CHI-RI instructor/facilitator course participants receiving their certificates at the celebration at Blaze. From left to right. Dr. Dannie Ritchie giving a certificate to Dr. Leonarda Rodriguez, Participants Bety Huaranga, Dr. Rodriguez and Dr. Solange Santana, Dr. Manuel Raposa from the Welcome Back Center of Dorcas Place and sponsor with Dr. Santana

#### Community Health Innovations of RI (chi-ri)

celebrated the completion of the first Community Health Worker instructor/facilitator course in the evening of June 29<sup>th</sup> at Blaze Restaurant in Providence. Many community, business, health and education leaders and public officials came by to celebrate with us and wish us well.

A lovely time was had by all. We celebrated the community health workers (CHW) that completed the course as well as those that have contributed to the efforts and recognition of CHWs in general. Those that completed the course and will become trainers were Bety Huaranga, Dr. Solange Santana and Dr. Leonarda Rodriguez. We heard from one of the facilitators and long time CHW extraordinaire Carolyn Campos as well as Beth Lamarre, the Coordinator of the Community Health Worker Association of RI.

The event also provided an opportunity to present a public launching of Community Health Innovations of Rhode Island. CHI-RI is a synergistic social venture that has been established to develop, train and prepare community health workers to increase the health, equity and quality of life in the populations they serve. The work's purpose is to create a level playing field for vulnerable communities. The efforts and programs focus is on taking action to make a difference in the health of Rhode Island by building the CHW workforce.

The facts are that in matters of a person's health, place matters. Where we are born, live, learn, work and play,

sets the stage for our personal health, development and lifetime opportunities. The work of chi-ri incorporates critical community development for engagement and advocacy through the training of CHWs our frontline public health workers.

The Federal government finally recognized CHWs as profession of their own in July of 2010 In a 2009 report by the RI Dept of Labor and Training revealed that RI has over 3000 chws and that there is a need for more. CHI-RI is positioned to effectively, along with the CHW Association to answer the call for the growing profession and actively work to fill what will be a growing demand.

CHWs are the way to engage, activate and advocate for the community to improve the community's health. CHWs can increase enrollment in health insurance, initiate service development in communities, increase clients' use of community resources and collect data to inform policy. CHI-RI's curriculums are purposely cultivated in the community at the grass roots level for those facing numerous challenges and health disparities. From our worker train the trainer models, to CCRI level class work, chi-ri aims to educate, support, evaluate and develop the CHW workforce.

If you or others you know are interested in becoming involved to make a difference please visit our website at [chi-ri.org](http://chi-ri.org) to get more information.

### Legislative News for CHWs!



Community Health Workers have more friends than many are aware of in the RI General Assembly. Representative Grace Diaz counts herself as a CHW. In April of this year she introduced House Resolution 11-202, Proclaiming the Month of April "Community Health

<http://www.rilin.state.ri.us/PublicLaws/law11/res11/res11202.htm>, which was enacted on April 13, 2011. Co-sponsors on

the Resolution were Representatives McNamara, Walsh, Messier, and Lima. We hope and expect the month of April to be a great month full of CHW activities in the coming year adding to the process of raising their profile.

Other important legislation this year that directly relates to CHWs is the statute to form a Commission for Health Advocacy and Equity. It was signed into law by Governor Chafee on the 30<sup>th</sup> of June. Senator Pichardo and Representative Walsh were the lead sponsors for bills S0481 and H5633 respectively.

<http://www.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText11/SenateText11/S0481A.pdf>.



Senator Juan Pichardo      Representative Donna Walsh

Cosponsors of the bills in the Senate, were Senators DiPalma, Metts, Jabour, and Nesselbush. Cosponsors in the House were Representatives Cimini, Ajello, Medina and Williams.

This legislation recognizes the Community Health Worker as any individual who assists and coordinates services between providers of health services, community services, and social agencies for vulnerable populations. Community health workers provide support and assist in navigating the health and social services system. And in the promotion of community health and equity the legislation recognizes that one of the many roles of CHWs is to advocate for solutions to the challenges and barriers to health that a community may face.

This legislation asks for measurement of disparities and benchmarks for accountability. Reporting to the public, legislatures and the Executive branch is required. Because it understands that health is beyond the clinical setting and is contributed by social conditions, it asks for comprehensive coordination across state agencies and sectors.

The rationale for the bill is that despite our many health programs and relatively better access to care the health disparities of RI remain extensive within the state and between states. In a report released by the County Health Rankings<sup>1</sup> in March of this year of Rhode Island's 5 counties Providence County followed by Kent County have the worse health rankings in the state. Bristol County ranked first. According to the 2010 edition of the America's Health Ranking done by the American Public Health Association and (APHA) the United Way<sup>2</sup> RI's health ranks last in New England.

The legislation to form the Commission provides for a new approach to address the worrisome health trends of our state. It is in line with federal legislation for health reform with cross sector analysis on and the recognition of CHWs as a workforce to be recognized as a major partner in the efforts to reduce disparities and improve equity.

It has been a good year in the state for the recognition of the Community health worker workforce. It is now up to CHW themselves and their advocates to build on the momentum to move the workforce forward as well as create greater opportunities to improve the health of our State's vulnerable communities.

### Ways you can get involved:

- Be put on the listserve
- Get information about joining the Board
- Get information about volunteering or giving in-kind donations
- Make a contribution

Contact us to let us at through the website [chi-ri.org](http://www.chi-ri.org)

**Get involved! Make a difference.**  
Visit [www.chi-ri.org](http://www.chi-ri.org) for more information

<sup>1</sup>[www.countyhealthrankings.org](http://www.countyhealthrankings.org),  
<sup>2</sup><http://www.americashealthrankings.org/>