

# **Visionary Insights: Empowering Communities with Eye Health, Community Health Workers, and Health Literacy**



## **IN THIS ISSUE**

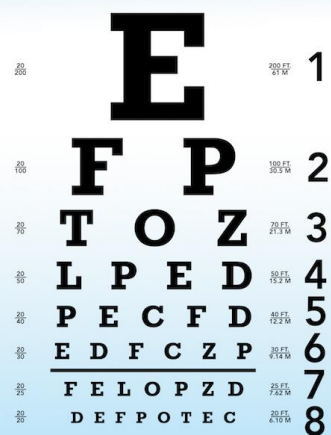
Unlock Better Health Outcomes with Community Health Workers

Dr. Carter's Corner, Closing the Healthcare Gap in Our Communities

Our Coalition is now even STRONGER! Welcome aboard, Lindaben and Mel Johnson International

The Power of Prevention: Helping Your Patients See Clearly

Free Training Opportunity: Outsmart COVID and Other Diseases with Project FirstLine's Online Courses



## Did you know August is Children's Eye Health & Safety Awareness Month?

This yearly observance promotes awareness about the importance of eye health and safety for children. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, one out of every four children has a vision issue that can negatively affect their learning and academic performance.

## Unlock Better Health Outcomes with Community Health Workers

Although community health workers (CHWs) are typically associated with the public health sector, they can also be valuable assets to private medical practices in the realm of chronic disease prevention. Chronic medical conditions, such as heart disease, diabetes, and cancer, are significant health issues affecting millions globally. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, these diseases account for 7 out of 10 deaths in the United States annually. Many chronic ailments can be prevented or managed through proactive intervention and appropriate care.



“I am pleased to relay my experience working with a Community Health Worker (CHW) as part of the PreventionLink program. We have seen a significant increase in patient enrollment into the program since the CHW began working in our office in April 2023. The on-site personal touch and ability to have patients meet with her face-to-face in the office at the time of their visit has made a difference and enabled our patients to understand and embrace the program. I highly recommend a continuation of this component of the program.”

Dr. Carla Lambert, MD - Family Medicine  
Beltsville, MD 20705

# Ways to use Community Health Workers (CHWs) in medical offices to prevent chronic diseases:

## 1. Health Education and Counseling

One of the key roles of CHWs is to provide culturally appropriate health education and counseling to patients. CHWs can educate patients about the risk factors for chronic diseases and teach them how to make healthy lifestyle choices. They can also provide motivational counseling to help patients maintain healthy habits and manage chronic conditions.

## 2. Care Coordination

CHWs can guide patients as they navigate the healthcare system by connecting them with appropriate resources and coordinating their care. This includes scheduling appointments with specialists, arranging transportation, and following up to ensure patients receive the necessary care they need.

## 3. Enhancing Public Health through Promotion, Outreach, and Resource Linking

Medical practices can effectively utilize CHWs to assist patients in accessing various services through community resources. These services may encompass arranging transportation to and from medical appointments, delivering relevant information regarding food pantries, as well as providing assistance with home health aide services.

## 4. Health Risk Assessments

CHWs can perform health risk assessments on patients to identify those at risk for chronic disease. The assessments may include blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar screenings. This information can aid doctors in developing personalized plans for preventing chronic disease or managing existing conditions.

## 5. Follow-Up and Support

CHWs can provide ongoing follow-up and support to patients to help them maintain healthy behaviors and manage chronic conditions. This can include phone check-ins, home visits, and support groups.

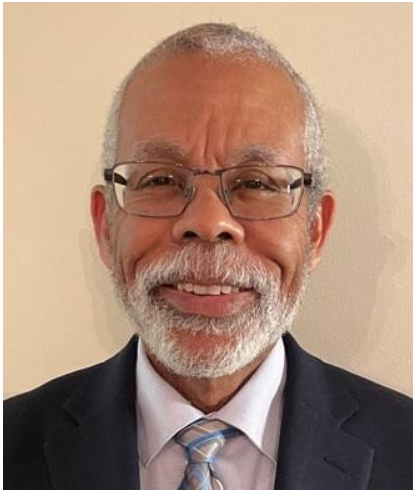
Incorporating CHWs into private medical practices can improve patient outcomes, increase patient satisfaction, and reduce healthcare costs. CHWs can also identify patients at risk for chronic disease and provide them with the tools and resources they need to stay healthy. They can also help patients with chronic conditions manage them more effectively.

CHWs are a valuable resource for preventing and managing chronic diseases. By partnering with private medical practices, they can improve health outcomes for patients and reduce the burden of chronic disease on the healthcare system. If you're a medical practice looking to improve patient care, consider adding a community health worker to your team.

***Are you interested in incorporating a CHW into your practice?***

To make a request, fill out the [Community Health Worker Outreach Request Form](#) and email it to CHWSupport@co.pg.md.us. A coordinator will be in touch with you soon.





## Dr. Carter's Corner

### Closing the Healthcare Gap

Access to quality healthcare should not be determined by where someone lives. It's time to address this issue and look closely at recent trends. Approximately 15% of Americans reside in rural areas and face similar healthcare challenges to those in urban areas. However, their problems often go unnoticed, leaving them neglected and underserved. The geography of Southern Maryland is unique, especially in Prince George's County. It is part urban and part rural, with many low-income and underprivileged people of color living in rural areas.

While many of our residents of rural communities may enjoy benefits such as a lower cost of living and a more relaxed lifestyle, some experience limited access to healthcare facilities and resources. Transportation can also be a significant challenge, particularly for low-income individuals needing emergency medical services or regular doctor visits.

Health literacy is another critical concern in rural communities. Limited resources and lower health literacy rates create unique needs among residents. Factors such as geographic remoteness can result in a lack of healthcare providers and a scarcity of culturally and linguistically appropriate materials.

Access to care is a pressing issue and consistently ranks as one of our top priorities. The COVID-19 pandemic has shed light on a potential solution: telehealth. Connecting providers with rural residents through telehealth can bridge the access gap, but more work must be done. We are addressing this by encouraging our network to leverage community health workers in their practices, but that alone is insufficient. Although health literacy is a non-health challenge, it is an important barrier that significantly hinders healthcare improvement. Medical terminology can be confusing and overwhelming, even for people with good educational backgrounds. It's vital for healthcare providers to understand that someone's appearance or communication skills don't necessarily indicate their level of health literacy.

PreventionLink is committed to tackling these challenges head-on. The solutions lie in embracing telehealth to reach remote residents and identifying signs of low health literacy. Here are a few examples to help you identify patients struggling to understand your medical directives.

Look for frequently missed appointments, incomplete forms, and non-compliance with medication. These are common red flags but also look for patients who struggle to name medications or to provide a coherent medical history and require extra support.

In addition to medical interventions, PreventionLink is working with iHealth to regularly and remotely monitor patients' blood pressure. A patient-clinician feedback loop can be established, providing guidance to patients with hypertension on selecting and using devices accurately. Patients can also share their readings remotely with the office. This approach can significantly improve disease management.

For a better future, it's essential to communicate healthcare information clearly and simply, ensuring that rural residents and all patients can fully understand and engage in their own care. Let's continue working together to ensure our healthcare system leaves no one behind.

# Exciting News:

## Two Community-Based Organizations Join PreventionLink IMPACT to Fight Diabetes



We are thrilled to announce that [Lindaben](#) and [Mel Johnson International Inc](#) have become new subsidiaries of PreventionLink IMPACT. This innovative initiative, led by the Prince George's County Health Department, aims to reduce diabetes rates in our communities significantly.

IMPACT, which stands for the Integrated Model for Prevention and Community Transformation, will serve as a central hub. It offers community-based organizations a cutting-edge and cost-effective strategy to combat diabetes.

Lindaben Foundation and The Mel Johnson International, Inc have recently been recognized by the Center for Disease Control Diabetes Prevention (CDC) Recognition Program (DPRP). They are actively implementing evidence-based lifestyle change program sessions. Through their community-based organizations, they will play a crucial role in supporting individuals at risk for type 2 diabetes, helping them improve their health and reduce their risk.

***As a former nurse, trauma surgeon, and public health director [I realized] there was a wall between us and the people we were trying to serve. Health care professionals do not recognize that patients do not understand the health information we are trying to communicate. We must close the gap between what healthcare professionals know and what the rest of America understands.***

***—Dr. Richard Carmona, former U.S. Surgeon General***

PREVENTION  
**LINK**  
of Southern Maryland



# The Power of Prevention:

## Help your patients see clearly with an annual eye exam

As fall approaches and children head back to school, it's important to remind patients, especially those living with or at risk for diabetes, to schedule their annual eye exams. Diabetes is the leading cause of vision loss in people between the ages of 18 and 64. Unfortunately, there aren't always obvious signs or symptoms of deterioration. By undergoing an annual routine eye exam, an astounding 95% of vision loss caused by diabetes can be prevented.

Diabetes and diabetic retinopathy affect certain groups of people more than others. Black American adults, for example, [have a 60% greater chance of being diagnosed with diabetes](#) than members of other groups. More than 800,000 Black Americans are currently suffering from diabetic retinopathy, which can ultimately lead to blindness. Native Americans are more likely to have type 2 diabetes than any other racial group in the U.S. Additionally, more than 3 million [Hispanics/Latinos may lose their vision due](#) to complications from diabetes by 2030.

We must stress the significance of early detection, encourage regular check-ups, and emphasize pairing appointments with routine physical exams. Together, we can help prevent diabetic eye disease and ensure that our patients continue to see clearly for years to come.



PREVENTION  
**LINK**  
of Southern Maryland





# Free Training Opportunity:

## Outsmart COVID and Other Diseases with Project FirstLine's Online Courses

Learn how to prevent COVID-19 and other diseases while at work with free courses from Project FirstLine and the Maryland Department of Health. These online courses cover basic Infection Control concepts and provide information on protecting yourself, your patients, residents, coworkers, and your community. They are available in English, Spanish, Haitian Creole, Tagalog, and Chinese. Share this email and the links below with your colleagues who want to take the courses in their preferred language. Simply click on the link to start learning using the Learning Management platform under the course titled "Hello."

[English](#)

[Spanish](#)

[Haitian Creole](#)

[Tagalog](#)

[Chinese \(Simplified\)](#)

PREVENTION  
**LINK**  
*of Southern Maryland*



**Like this newsletter?**

Share it with your colleagues and let's make a difference in Southern Maryland together.