

Sustainable THW Payment Models Toolkit

Oregon Health Authority

Transformation Center

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HEALTH
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Executive summary

Traditional health workers (THWs) are trusted individuals from their communities who may also share socioeconomic ties and lived experiences with health plan members. THW is an umbrella term used in Oregon for multiple specific worker types who have historically provided person- and community-centered care by bridging communities and the health systems that serve them. THWs increase the appropriate use of care by connecting people with health systems, advocating for health plan members, supporting adherence to care and treatment, and empowering individuals to be agents in improving their own health.

Traditional health workers include:

- Community health workers (CHWs)
- Birth doulas
- Personal health navigators (PHNs)
- Peers: Peer wellness specialists (PWSs) and peer support specialists (PSSs)
 - PSSs can be specific to families, youth, adult addictions or adult mental health.
- Tribal traditional health workers

The Oregon Health Authority (OHA) provides multiple routes to pay for THW services and THW programs to expand and sustain the THW workforce. OHA partners with coordinated care organizations and community-based organizations to ensure a holistic, community-informed approach to THW integration into the health system. Each partner is crucial to the success of THWs and THW programs.

This document brings together resources for developing sustainable THW programs by providing:

- Information about THW roles and responsibilities, including example job descriptions.
- Background on THW programs and THW integration in Oregon's health system.
- Case studies on successful THW programs and program assistance.

- A THW program budgeting tool to estimate costs and revenues using Medicaid fee-for-service.
- Links to resources on payment models and sustainable funding structures for THW programs.

Overview

Traditional health workers (THWs) are an integral part of the Oregon health system. THWs work in many settings around the state to address health and social needs in their community. The state of Oregon and the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) are invested in the advancement and integration of THWs as a key strategy to reach the triple aim of better health, better care and lower costs. THWs are crucial to achieving health equity and improved access to care. OHA and Oregon's coordinated care organizations (CCOs) offer multiple routes to pay for THW services.

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- Case studies on successful THW programs and program assistance.
- A THW program budgeting tool to estimate costs and revenues using Medicaid fee-for-service.
- Links to resources on payment models and sustainable funding structures for THW programs.

This document was prepared for the OHA Transformation Center by the Oregon Rural Practice Based Research Network.

The Transformation Center is the hub for innovation and quality improvement for Oregon's health system transformation efforts to achieve better health, better care and lower costs for all. The center identifies, strategically supports and shares innovation at the system, community and practice levels. Through collaboration, the Transformation Center promotes initiatives to advance the coordinated care model.

Oregon Rural Practice Based Research Network (ORPRN) is a statewide network of primary care clinicians, community partners and researchers dedicated to studying the

delivery of health care, improving the health of Oregonians and reducing rural health disparities. Since ORPRN's start in 2002, they have completed more than 80 funded projects and are nationally recognized for expertise in practice facilitation and implementing patient-centered primary care home practice redesign initiatives. ORPRN's mission is to improve health and equity for all Oregonians through community-engaged research, education and policy.

About traditional health workers

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THW scope of practice

A scope of practice is the activities or services a given health care provider can perform. Each THW type has a unique scope of practice based on their training, experience and role in the community. THW scopes of practice fall into six categories:

- Care coordination
- Outreach and direct service
- Coaching and social support
- Advocacy, organizing and cultural mediation
- Education
- Assessment, evaluation and research

Full scopes of practice are available in the [THW Toolkit](#).

THWs in Oregon

THWs have played an important role in the health of people in Oregon for decades, though the formalization of THW roles at the statewide level is more recent. In 2011, the Oregon Legislature passed [House Bill \(HB\) 3650](#) to develop an integrated and coordinated health care delivery system as well as mandate development and implementation of traditional health workers in the system transformation process. [Oregon Administrative Rule 950-060-0000](#) further established rules related to THWs, including definitions and requirements for training and service provision.

As of November 2024, there were over 6,500 THWs registered through Oregon's Traditional Health Worker Registry, which is free to join and tracks all THWs who are trained and certified through the state to provide services. Current certification through the Oregon registry is required for a THW to be paid by the Oregon Health Plan (Oregon's Medicaid program) for services provided to Oregon Health Plan members. Learn more about billing for THW services in the THW billing guidance document.

Beyond education, training and certification requirements for individual THWs, CCOs are required to report on progress toward THW integration and utilization in their health delivery systems. This reporting helps OHA understand and respond to community needs, advance the THW workforce and expand access to THW services. Learn more about [CCO reporting on THWs](#).

THWs have many important roles in their communities, as detailed in their scope of practice (available in the [THW Toolkit](#)). THWs can work in a wide variety of organizations,

including hospitals, health clinics, CCOs, schools, health departments, and community-based organizations.

Integration and connection with health care system

THWs have been a central part of Oregon's health system transformation since 2011 when the Oregon Legislature passed HB 3650. Implementation of HB 3650 began with defining THW roles and responsibilities and charting a path toward a coordinated health system with THWs integrated into health systems. Payment for THW services is an essential step toward integration of this role within the health care system statewide, and an important feature of a sustainable THW program and workforce.

Many studies have shown the positive impact THWs have on health and health systems. Learn more about evidence for THWs in these summaries:

- [Evidence-based community health worker program addresses unmet social needs and generates positive return on investment](#)
- [Community health worker support for disadvantaged patients with multiple chronic diseases: a randomized clinical trial](#)
- [Community health workers: Evidence of their effectiveness](#)
- [Peer support workers for those in recovery](#)
- [Doula care improves health outcomes, reduce racial disparities and cuts cost](#)
- [What are patient navigators and how can they improve integration of care?](#)

Statewide THW efforts

Multiple OHA divisions and OHA partners have a role in Oregon's approach to expanding and sustaining the THW workforce. Beyond state-led THW efforts, many community-based organizations, hospitals, clinics and local governments are investing in and supporting THWs in their facilities and communities. Resources and information about THWs and THW programs are available from many sources.

- [OHA Equity and Inclusion Division](#): The Equity and Inclusion Division is home to the THW Program, which oversees or manages THW training, certification and

other requirements. The THW Program is the central resource for THWs and THW programs.

Contact: THW.program@odhsoha.oregon.gov

- **[THW Commission](#)**: The Equity and Inclusion Division's THW Program manages the THW Commission to promote the traditional health workforce in Oregon's health care delivery system. The commission advises and makes recommendations to OHA to ensure the program is responsive to consumer and community health needs, while delivering high-quality and culturally competent care.

Contact: THW.program@odhsoha.oregon.gov

- **[OHA Transformation Center](#)**: The Transformation Center is OHA's hub for innovation and quality improvement efforts, including implementing spending programs and other alternative payment programs. These programs and models can be used to pay for THW services including and beyond Medicaid covered services.

Contact: Transformation.Center@odhsoha.oregon.gov

- **[Oregon Medicaid \(Oregon Health Plan\)](#)**: The Medicaid Division administers Oregon's Medicaid program, also known as the Oregon Health Plan. This includes provider enrollment and certification, billing and claims processing, contracting with coordinated care organizations, overseeing coverage and eligibility for individual members and more.

Contact: Ask.OHP@odhsoha.oregon.gov

- **[Coordinated care organization \(CCOs\)](#)**: CCOs are local health plans that manage benefits for most OHP members. Each CCO is required to have a THW liaison to support and advance THWs and THW services for their organization and members.

Contact: Find the CCO(s) that serve your region(s) on [OHA's CCO webpage](#).

Some OHP members are on Open Card/fee-for-service plans and do not have a CCO, their health care is managed by OHA instead of a CCO.

In addition to these OHA divisions and partners, many independent organizations are dedicated to supporting and advancing THW roles, services and programs. Some of these organizations include:

- [Oregon Community Health Workers Association](#)
- [Mental Health & Addiction Association of Oregon](#)
- [Peer Support Oregon](#)
- [Oregon Doula Association](#)

About THW programs

THW services and programs can take many forms and should be designed with community needs and assets in mind. Understanding the needs of the community is an important first step to developing a successful program. Familiarity with community assets is also crucial for a successful program. Relationships with other community resources and programs can help maximize resources within the community. Further, THWs and THW programs frequently include care coordination or navigation services, including connecting individuals and families to resources in their community.

THW programs and services can be provided in many settings, like health clinics or hospitals, at community-based organizations, in schools, at community events or in a patient's home. THW services are distinct actions a THW provides, while a THW program is a holistic approach to providing THW services, typically offering administrative and other support to THWs. THWs can also work for and with a wide variety of institutions across a community.

Potential funding sources for THW services

There are many possible sources of funding for THW services and programs. Typically, a program will need to bring together multiple funding sources to cover the costs of the THW(s) and program overhead. Using multiple sources to fund a holistic program or service is known as braiding funding. Here are some tips for developing a funding strategy:

WHO

Identify the population(s) your program serves and funding sources that align with the population and services.

HOW

Use resources in the appendices for budgeting and job descriptions to understand program funding needs and possible structures.

SEARCH

Search for a variety of funding sources. Typically, multiple sources will be needed as funding sources often have some restrictions on what they can be used for. Having diverse funding sources helps improve overall program sustainability.

COLLABORATE: Include finance or contracting professionals in discussions with funders about reimbursement and funding requirements.

Medicaid and Medicare

Medicaid and Medicare are two government-run health insurance programs for specific populations. Medicaid, known in Oregon as the Oregon Health Plan (OHP), provides health care coverage for people from all walks of life. This includes working families, children, pregnant adults, single adults and seniors. Medicare is usually for people 65 or older, though some people can get Medicare earlier if they have a disability, End-Stage Renal Disease, or ALS (also called Lou Gehrig's disease). Learn more about OHP coverage and options on the [OHP benefits webpage](#).

Billing Medicaid or Medicare for services has many important benefits, though it can come with some challenges. Medicaid and Medicare are stable sources of funding that can be associated with the quantity or value of services provided.

There are two primary ways Medicaid coverage is provided in Oregon: Open Card/Fee-for-service, where OHA manages and pays for an individual's covered benefits directly to the health care provider; and CCO coverage where a CCO manages and pays for an individual's health care services on behalf of OHA. Most OHP members are enrolled with a CCO for comprehensive health, behavioral and dental care. For Open Card/fee-for-service OHP members, OHA covers THW services with fee-for-service reimbursement. For

Medicaid members assigned to CCOs, OHP allows for traditional fee-for-service reimbursement and value-based payment models for THW services provided to members, in addition to multiple spending programs to address the social determinants of health and equity. CCOs determine whether to offer value-based payment models for THW services, and these opportunities vary by CCO.

Learn more about the billing process and plans in the THW Billing Guidance document. More resources are linked below in the [Resources](#).

Grants

Grant funding can be a more flexible source of funds and often requires less ongoing administration compared with billing Medicaid or Medicare. Grants are often available from private foundations, governments, businesses or health care organizations. Grant funding often requires a competitive application process where nonprofit organizations submit applications to fund specific activities or programs. Grant funding can present challenges for ongoing programs as funding is often time-limited and may be restricted to only cover certain aspects of a program (for example, many grants limit the amount that can be spent on program administration). Grant opportunities that are available in many communities include:

- Nonprofit hospital community benefit
- CCO Supporting Health for All through RE-investment (SHARE) or flexible services grants for THW services not covered by Medicaid
- Private foundations
- Oregon Health Authority grants
- Businesses with ties to the community

Fundraising

Nonprofit organizations can raise funds from individual donors to fund meaningful work. Funds from individual donors are often unrestricted and can fill gaps between more restricted funding sources like Medicaid billing or grants.

Learn more about funding and payment models in the [THW Payment Model Guidance document](#).

Case studies

There are innovative ways to address the administrative burdens associated with billing Medicaid for THW services. Learn more about support and structures that can increase payments to THWs and THW programs below.

EOCCO's THW program

Eastern Oregon Coordinated Care Organization (EOCCO) administers OHP across twelve Eastern Oregon counties. EOCCO's focus on supporting organizations with THWs and THW programs has resulted in a significant number of THWs providing and billing fee-for-service for services for EOCCO members. The coordinated approach has led to over 450 THWs on the statewide THW registry in their region and over 200 THWs actively billing and being reimbursed for services under contracts with the CCO. THW liaison Hannah Briggs says, "Outreach is the key to having so many THWs billing for services."

About THW liaisons

Every CCO is required to employ a THW liaison. THW liaisons are intended to support the integration of THWs into the health care workforce.

EOCCO's approach begins with the idea that each individual THW is important. EOCCO's THW program, led by their THW liaison, provides extensive support and technical assistance to THWs, THW programs and organizations with THWs to help them bill for services. EOCCO has developed a comprehensive program to engage and support THW billing with community outreach. EOCCO's strong relationship with regular communication with OHA is at the center of the program. EOCCO's THW program includes:

- **Guidance:** A comprehensive quick-start billing guide with details on training, certification, billing requirements and billing codes. EOCCO also offers a 1-page

overview of the guide to make the resource more accessible and understandable to new users. See examples online: [EOCCO THW Quick-Start and Billing Guide](#), [CHW Billing Training webinar](#) and [webinar slides](#).

- **Policies:** Specific policies for each THW type and guidance on how to meet the policies. Policies cover THW enrollment with EOCCO, requirements for supervision, scope of practice and EOCCO's oversight role.
- **Newsletters:** Monthly newsletter with information and resources like upcoming webinars, trainings, guidance documents and more. See examples on [EOCCO's newsletter archive](#).
- **Meetings:** Monthly meetings focused on addressing THW needs, including training sessions or open office hours and networking opportunities. Meetings are open to any interested community members, though topics are aimed at supporting THWs, THW program staff like supervisors, organizations interested in developing THW programs, and others who are interested in supporting or expanding the THW workforce and services.
- **Trainings:** Billing training, including sessions for three to six hours that dive into the billing process for THWs. Training sessions are available upon request to THWs or organizations that want to understand the billing process and begin submitting claims for reimbursement.
- **Convenings:** Annual summits to bring together THWs and THW program staff, like supervisors, to network, collaborate and learn.
- **Targeted technical assistance:** One-on-one meetings with the THW liaison and other CCO staff as needed to directly address questions or concerns from individual THWs and THW programs. These meetings often include provider relations or billing staff so issues can be clearly and directly addressed.
- **Grants:** Funding for THW training or administrative efforts to prepare to bill for THWs through the CCO's [Supporting Health for All Through RE-investment \(SHARE\)](#) funds. [Flexible services](#) funds from CCOs can be used to pay for non-covered services that complement covered benefits provided by THWs.

Flexible services and SHARE are two Medicaid spending programs that may address the social determinants of health and equity needs.

Learn more about EOCCO's THW program, resources and contact information on the [EOCCO website](#).

Bridges to Health billing hub

PacificSource Community Solutions, a CCO serving Central Oregon, Columbia Gorge, Lane County, and Marion and Polk Counties, offers a payment model for community-based THW services that provides a combination of per member per month payment for one-on-one THW services, group THW services and overhead payment for administrative. Learn more about PacificSource's model in the [THW Payment Model Guidance](#).

One of the organizations that participates in PacificSource's program is the Columbia Gorge Health Council. Through their Bridges to Health program, the Columbia Gorge Health Council is a billing hub for CHWs at organizations across their community.

What is a billing hub?

Billing hubs offer a centralized approach to contract administration and billing activities, with the aim of reducing the administrative burden on service delivery organizations.

Bridges to Health holds a contract with PacificSource for CHW services delivered to PacificSource members. Bridges to Health partners with other local organizations with CHWs who deliver services to members. Those local organizations deliver, document and report on the services delivered to Bridges to Health/Columbia Gorge Health Council, who pays the organizations for the services. Bridges to Health supports local organizations and CHWs in many ways. Key aspects of the program include:

- **Per member per month payment** for CHW services through PacificSource's programmatic payment model; CHWs are typically employed by trusted community-based organizations.
- **Technology** resources and support, including access to the ActivateCare care coordination software.

- **Technical assistance**, including guidance for supervision, quality improvement and compliance, data collection and sharing, and monthly convenings for CHWs and other THWs to connect and collaborate.
- **Training and certification** for CHWs, including supporting CHWs through Oregon-approved training programs, offering ongoing skill-building opportunities and educational resources.
- **Data tracking and analysis** to understand program outcomes and improve services.

While the programmatic payment model has helped Bridges to Health and their partners expand access to CHW services and improved health outcomes for clients, the model has some tradeoffs. While the flat rate for services makes the reimbursement process simple and easy, it doesn't always cover the true cost for complex client needs.

Overall, the Bridges to Health program has impressive outcomes. Notably, the program has expanded the CHW workforce from 1.5 full-time equivalent (FTE) to 12.5 FTE. 84% of clients reported feeling better connected to services and resources, and 78% of clients reported their quality of life has improved since receiving services from Bridges to Health partners and CHWs. Learn more about [Bridges to Health's program outcomes](#).

Learn more about the Bridges to Health model and their impact on [Columbia Gorge Health Council's website](#).

Resources

- [OHP THW Billing Guide](#): Includes a step-by-step overview of the training, certification and billing processes for THWs.
- [OHP THW Payment Model Guide](#): Provides an overview of funding models and sources available for THWs and includes four CCO case studies on payment structures used to incentivize or pay for THW services.
- [Flexible Services webpage](#): Information and guidance about flexible services, a spending program to pay for non-covered services that complement covered

benefits under Oregon's Medicaid State Plan to improve member and community health and well-being.

- [Traditional Health Workers and Flexible Services](#): Guidance about how flexible services can be used to fund THW programs and services.
- [SHARE webpage](#): Information and guidance about Supporting Health for All Through REinvestment (SHARE), a spending pathway for CCOs to invest in their community and address the social determinants of health and equity.
- [Health-related social needs \(HRSN\) webpage](#): Information and guidance about HRSN covered services, which can help address social and economic needs that impact health for certain populations.
- [Oregon Medicaid Professional Billing Instructions](#): Guidance for providers on how to bill Medicaid for covered services.
- [OHP billing main webpage](#): Information and guidance about billing for Medicaid covered services.
- [Presentation on OHP billing basics](#): Overview of the Medicaid billing process including details about determining member eligibility, documentation and billing, and links to more resources.
- [Medicare billing for community health integration services](#): Information about coverage of services to address certain social factors that impact health for Medicare recipients.
- [Oregon Community Health Workers Association](#): Statewide professional association for community health workers (CHWs) dedicated to empowering and advocating for CHWs.
- [Mental Health & Addiction Association of Oregon](#): Peer-run organization dedicated to developing the peer workforce and leadership through training, advocacy, resources and community collaboration.
- [Peer Support Oregon](#): Coalition of organizations dedicated to expanding peer services and the peer workforce.
- [Oregon Doula Association](#): Statewide professional association providing support and resources to doulas.

- [OHA's CCO THW deliverables webpage](#): Information and guidance about THW reporting requirements for CCOs.
- [OHA's CCO webpage](#): Overview of CCO plans and options for OHP coverage.
- [Oregon Health Plan webpage](#): Overview of the Oregon Health Plan (Oregon's Medicaid program).
- [Transformation Center webpage](#): Overview of OHA's Transformation Center, the innovation and quality improvement hub.
- [THW Commission webpage](#): Information and resources from the THW Commission, the group that promotes the traditional health workforce in Oregon's Health Care Delivery System.
- [Equity and Inclusion Division webpage](#): Overview and resources from OHA's Equity and Inclusion Division, the home of the THW Program.

Contacts

About this document: Transformation.Center@odhsoha.oregon.gov

About traditional health workers: OHA's Office of Equity and Inclusion's THW Program at THW.program@odhsoha.oregon.gov

Your CCO: Find [CCO contact information on the OHA website](#).

Appendix A: THW job description template

A THW job description should reflect the organization's values and mission or goals, as well as qualifications like experience, training and key duties. Include details for each of the following key points:

- Organization and program overview
- Overview of the role
- Detailed job responsibilities (reference scope of practice as needed)
- Training, experience and qualifications
- Compensation
- Anticipated schedule and number of hours per week

Sample job descriptions can be found online via Google search or job search engines like Indeed.com, LinkedIn.com, or ZipRecruiter.com.

Job description template

Job Title:

Department:

Compensation:

Schedule:

Work location:

Organization and/or department overview: *Include information like organization's mission, vision and values; description of the programs or services offered; population(s) served; workplace culture or setting.*

Position summary: *Brief, one-paragraph overview of the role, including details like:*

- *High level overview of the job duties*
- *Population(s) the THW will be working with*
- *The THW's role within the department or organization*
- *Opportunity for impact and/or professional growth*

Key responsibilities: *Detailed list of specific tasks or activities the THW will be responsible for. Some examples may include:*

- *Receive and respond to referrals*
- *Identify and connect clients to social services or medical care*
- *Work with clients to address barriers to accessing care or services, including transportation and scheduling*
- *Educate clients about smoking cessation, activities of daily living, or adhering to health care plans*
- *Collect, document and properly store data about services and clients*
- *Maintain client confidentiality*
- *Participate in trainings and/or continuing education*
- *Other related duties as assigned*

Qualifications: *Detailed list of qualifications like education, training, experience, skills or certification requirements. Note whether specific qualifications are required or preferred. Examples may include:*

- *Education: High school diploma or GED required*
- *Training and certification: Ability to complete THW training and certification requirements set by the Oregon Health Authority required; current training and certification preferred*
- *Knowledge, skills and experience:*
 - *Knowledge of local community preferred*
 - *Experience working with specific population(s) required*
 - *Ability to work well with others, including traits like patience, caring and understanding*
- *Language: Bilingual in English and Spanish preferred (include pay differential for bilingual language proficiency if applicable)*
- *Driver's license and/or access to vehicle or reliable transportation required*
- *Ability to complete background check*

Benefits: *Overview of available benefits, including health, dental, vision, retirement, paid time off, etc.*

More information about application process or organization, as needed: *This may include an equal opportunity statement, process or timeline for hiring, or more organizational background.*

Appendix B: THW program cost structure

THW programs can take many forms depending on the organization or employer and patient or community needs. Use the calculator below to estimate program costs and Medicaid fee-for-service revenue.

[Download THW program budget estimator](#)

Appendix C: Documentation and billing templates

Documentation is an important step for billing for THW services. There are many platforms for THWs to track services. No matter the platform, it is important to know whether the information you are collecting and the manner in which you are collecting and using the information is protected by the [Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act \(HIPAA\)](#). Certain health care providers and clinics are considered covered entities by HIPAA, meaning they must comply with privacy standards for protected health information. Learn more on the [Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services website](#), and determine whether you are a covered entity using their [covered entity decision tool](#).

Information to collect for fee-for-service billing:

- Recipient full name
- Medicaid ID number
- CCO
- Provider (THW) name or identification number
- Date of service(s)
- Location of service(s)
- Details about service(s) provided

[Download the THW service documentation collection template](#): An Excel template for collecting data about THW services provided including all information required to bill for THW services.

[View a sample health insurance claim form on the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services website](#).