



## ***EACH Collaborative: Filling a Gap in Perinatal Care & Support for Families***

The Center for Community Health Alignment (CCHA) is working in partnership with the EACH Collaborative, a group of organizations based in South Carolina to expand the availability of perinatal community health workers (CHWs) for families who need them.

Perinatal CHWs are professional non-clinical support providers who help pregnant and parenting families to connect with information, resources, and capacity to improve their social determinants of health (such as housing, transportation, education, insurance, and more). They also bring insight and information from the community back to clinical services for quality improvement.

With funding from the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of South Carolina Foundation, the EACH Collaborative members designed a toolkit, training curriculum, and system for funding more perinatal CHW programs in South Carolina. Through a competitive grant process, a selection committee gave the first year's grant to Shifa Clinic, a free medical clinic in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina.

Shifa Clinic was founded in 2012 to serve uninsured and low-income families. It initially started as a part-time gynecological service, but over the years has grown into a full-time multi-specialty clinic with the support of local organizations, donors, and volunteers. Shifa Clinic started its prenatal services in 2017, offering a network of licensed providers, no-cost lab services, genetic screening, and onsite no-cost ultrasounds. They contract with a local hospital to coordinate high-risk pregnancy care and deliveries.

“Providers are very busy - we have patients scheduled, so there's only so much time that the provider can spend with each patient,” says Dr. Reshma Khan, medical director of Shifa Clinic. “And then above all, there's a lot of language barriers, cultural barriers as well. So having a community health worker on site helps us overcome those barriers.”

The Shifa Clinic team has worked with the PASOs Program to hire, train, and support a perinatal CHW to strengthen their services to their majority Latinx patients. They hired Erica Figueroa, a former paramedic and mother of three, originally from Puerto Rico, and who has lived in South Carolina for 11 years.

CHW Figueroa attended PASOs' 160-hour CHW Core Competency Training and then passed the South Carolina CHW Credentialing exam with the highest grade in her cohort. She has



also attended specialized trainings focused on perinatal health and child developmental milestones.

Since starting in April as the Shifa Clinic's full-time perinatal CHW, CHW Figueroa has already helped over 100 families using PASOs' CHW model. Understanding each participant is unique, using the model and her training, she is able to support them in whatever way they need.

Many seek help accessing healthcare services like primary care or cancer screenings. Some want information about family planning or how to receive WIC support. CHW Figueroa has made a commitment to identifying resources for the families she supports, including becoming a Medicaid Navigator through SC Thrive.

"Doctors are important, the clinic is important, but the CHW is the connection between them and the families," CHW Figueroa says. "And that is the connection of the culture."

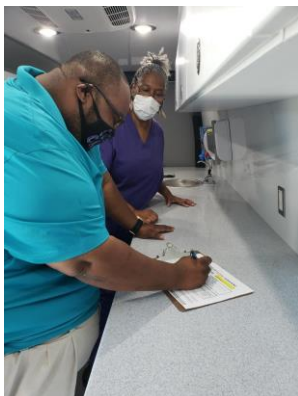
### **Eliminating Barriers to Care**

CHW Figueroa shares the story of one family, who speaks another language besides English and Spanish, and whose toddler wasn't talking yet. Because of the language barrier, they hadn't accessed support services to help their child.



As Shifa Clinic's CHW CHW Figueroa was able to connect them with Help Me Grow (HMG), a local resource for child developmental assessments and resources. Upon following up, CHW Figueroa discovered the HMG team wasn't able to reach the parents to follow up on the case. Because of her diligence the HMG team was able to contact the family, and they have started working with the child.

### **Expanding Knowledge of Medical Needs**



In another case, CHW Figueroa found out that one of the Shifa Clinic's patients with diabetes was paying someone to administer his insulin injections. CHW Figueroa explained that this is a medication that is meant to be self-administered, and he did not need to pay someone to do it. She also helped him understand the other healthcare needs that he would need to pay attention to because of his diabetes, like monitoring his blood pressure and doing foot checks.

## **Supporting Clinician and Patient Communication**



In another case, CHW Figueroa also stepped in when a doctor was concerned that their patient needed to go to the emergency room due to a dangerous level of anemia. The physician brought in CHW Figueroa to talk with her, and make sure the patient understood that she needed urgent care for her condition.

After a conversation with CHW Figueroa, the patient admitted she was planning on returning to work and underestimated the severity of her situation. The CHW made sure to make sure the patient understood what was happening and why the doctor was making that recommendation.

“You really need to have a heart to help others in order to do this, because it's not easy,” CHW Figueroa says. “It's not peaches and cream all the time. You're dealing with human beings, and sometimes they are in their hormones or they're anxious or desperate. Sometimes, they will act in a different way that you're not expecting, but you have to understand that and help them, not to take it personal or anything,” CHW Figueroa says. “Even on my bad days, I still have this sensation that yes, I help people.”

Recently, CHW Figueroa received a letter from someone that she had helped during their pregnancy to decide on what type of family planning method she wanted to use after she had her baby.

“She helps me with information and I'm so grateful to her. People like me come to this country blind, because we don't know anything about how things work here, and we're so thankful to this institution and people like her for what they do for us.”

You can find more information about the EACH Collaborative [here](#).