



Meeting a Demand for Bilingual Medical Assistants

Overview and Lessons on
the Training Model

INDUSTRY BRIEF

Background

Qualified and skilled bilingual and culturally competent medical assistants play a critical role in serving New York City's (NYC) diverse patient population. However, employers report that recruiting for this workforce can be challenging. With new care delivery models and an industry shift from inpatient to outpatient ambulatory care, the demand for this role is projected to grow. Exacerbating this recruitment challenge, healthcare providers are seeking a workforce that reflects the diverse population they serve, especially in roles with high patient engagement.

Meanwhile, the many immigrant communities in NYC are untapped resources of bicultural and bilingual workers seeking a career opportunity or higher skilled work. According to a report by World Education Services (WES), New American Economy, and Migration Policy Institute, among the key barriers this populations faces are a lack of access to critical information including guidance on how to acculturate to the American workplace; difficult to navigate licensing and certification pathways; and limited access to higher-level vocational and English classes that go beyond the basic English offered in community classes¹. To serve these communities and leverage their skills and lived experience as an asset for the healthcare industry, there is a need for stronger educational pathways for English language learner New Yorkers to get started in the field. Employers have identified the medical assistant occupation as a great opportunity for job seekers to get their foot in the door and begin their careers, while meeting an immediate and growing workforce need.

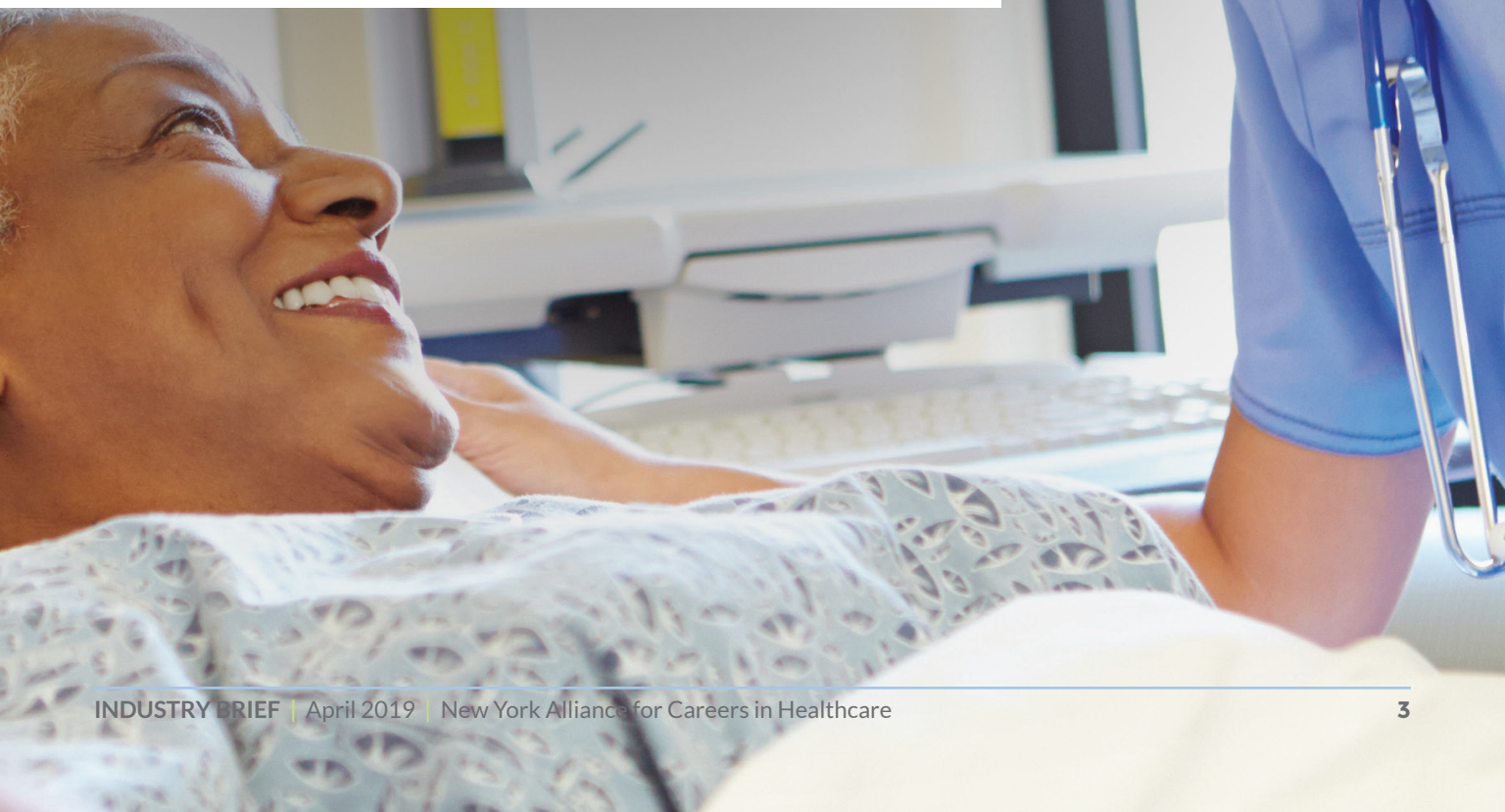
¹ Batalova, Jeanne, Michael Fix, and James D. Bachmeier. "Untapped Talent: The Costs of Brain Waste among Highly Skilled Immigrants in the United States." *World Education Services* (2016)

DESIGNING A SOLUTION: BILINGUAL MEDICAL ASSISTANT PROGRAM MODEL

NYACH worked with employers to define the workforce challenge and design a solution that would translate intrinsic language skills and cultural competency into an asset for employment. The program was built to leverage more New Yorkers' foundational language skills by providing a bridge program prior to an educational program that they would not otherwise be able to access due to limited English language skills. The result of that effort was the design of the Bilingual Medical Assistant Training Program.

The program aims to:

- Meet industry demand for diverse and bilingual medical assistants in NYC
- Prepare jobseekers with the required core competencies, clinical, and administrative skills sought after for medical assistants working in today's health care system
- Improve access to careers in healthcare for English language learner New Yorkers



Approach

As the City's healthcare industry partnership, NYACH was well positioned to lead the effort to build a successful medical assistant training model that achieved programmatic goals and led to systemic change in the industry. Through established partnerships and recognition in the healthcare workforce development ecosystem, NYACH strategically convened key employers, experts, and education providers to drive all aspects of this effort and ensure the program met industry need.

Engage key industry leaders and educators in developing the model

The curriculum was developed and enhanced in close collaboration with community health centers and hospital-based ambulatory care centers

Employer partners provided input on the program eligibility assessment and screening tools, curriculum, the internship skills checklist, and the contextualized English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) components of the curriculum

Focus on the skills needed in today's healthcare system

The medical assistant curriculum was redesigned at the City University of New York (CUNY) with a focus on new population health and care delivery models

[NYACH's Core Competencies for Today's Healthcare Workforce](#) were integrated into the program, which include patient-centered care, working on interdisciplinary teams, and cultural competency

The program prepared medical assistants for both clinical and front desk administrative responsibilities, including the use of electronic health records, health insurance, scheduling, and providing customer service

Tailor the program for English Language Learners

Designed an ESOL bridge that is contextualized for the medical assistant role to help students obtain the English skills required to excel in this position

Included medical assistant vocabulary in three languages to ensure that graduates are prepared to work with patients who speak their native languages

To learn more about NYACH's enhanced medical assistant program that served as the foundation for the bilingual medical assistant model, see the [Occupational Profile: Medical Assistant](#).

Partners

NYACH worked collaboratively with key partners to leverage diverse expertise across the healthcare and workforce development system to develop the program model:

Employer partners

provided input on the medical assistant curriculum to ensure it aligned with the skills in demand for medical assistants in today's healthcare delivery system

Workforce1 Career Center in Washington Heights

recruited for the program and provided tailored career readiness supports on an as-needed basis to support foreign-born New Yorkers

LaGuardia Community College (LGACC)

wrote the curriculum, with support from Hostos Community College, leveraging its experience with its medical assistant program and its history of developing tailored education programs for immigrant communities

Foundations

provided funding that allowed for flexibility in developing a robust model. Curriculum development and services delivered by the Workforce1 Career Center in Washington Heights were supported by the Robin Hood Foundation; NYACH's employer engagement and real-time industry feedback is made possible due to support from the NYC Workforce Funders and JPMorgan Chase Foundation

Program Components

This development effort culminated in a program model at LGACC, which includes the following best-practice components:

Rigorous assessment process: that included an online form that assesses for basic eligibility; an information session that provides an overview of the training program and the medical assistant occupation (if they are invited based on eligibility); an English language literacy and oral tests to ensure they will be able to complete the bridge program; an application that captures their interest in the occupation, ability to succeed in the training program, and past work experience; a computer literacy test; and finally an interview with LGACC.

Targeted recruitment: English language learner, low-wage workers with intermediate levels of English proficiency and a passion for patient care.

Accommodating schedule: part-time evening and weekend schedule that allows students to work simultaneously, opening access to those who cannot afford to attend a full-time program.

Contextualized ESOL bridge: students start with a 200-hour ESOL bridge course that aims to improve the reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills of intermediate level English speakers and is contextualized for the medical assistant training and occupation. A bridge is considered a “pre-training” that prepares students with the academic or language skills to be ready to be enroll in an occupational training.

Enhanced clinical medical assistant training: a 368-hour enhanced medical assistant training that covers core competencies and clinical and administrative skills. Students are prepared for the American Heart Association’s CPR

certification and the National Healthcareer Association’s EKG, Phlebotomy, and CCMA national certifications as well as for medical office responsibilities such as verifying insurance and scheduling patients. The curriculum relies heavily on interactive activities such as role-plays and skills practice.

Integrated ESOL support: additional hours of English language instruction and technical co-teaching are integrated into the curriculum to support the success of English language learners in a highly technical occupational training program.

Medical vocabulary modules in the native language: students learn medical vocabulary in their native languages (for Spanish, Mandarin Chinese, and French speakers) in order to improve their ability to provide care in multiple languages.

Internship: students complete a 100-hour paid internship at a healthcare organization with support from both the host site and the training provider, and work towards demonstrated competency in the skills included on an employer-vetted internship skills checklist.

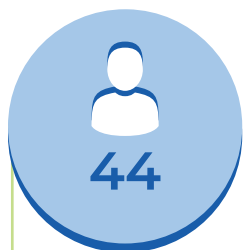
Continuous employer engagement: medical assistant employers informed the curriculum and model development, were brought on to screen candidates for the program, conducted class and site visits, hosted students as interns, and interviewed all successful medical assistant graduates for available positions. Throughout program delivery, employer feedback was integrated into the model on an ongoing basis.

Tailored services: throughout the program students receive support services tailored to their needs in order to encourage persistence through a long and intensive program.

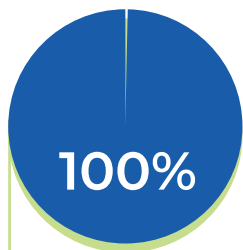


PROGRAM OUTCOMES

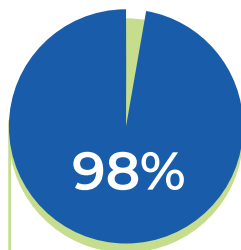
Bilingual Medical Assistant Training Program Outcomes as of April 2019



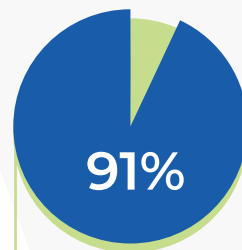
Students Enrolled



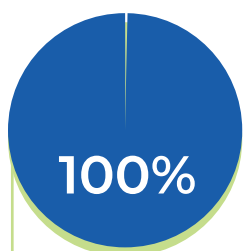
Percentage completing ESOL bridge



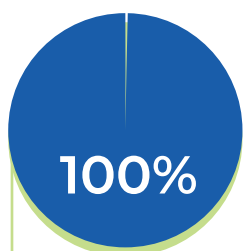
Percentage transitioning to medical assistant training



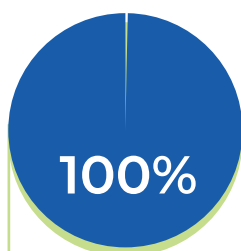
Percentage completing medical assistant training hours and passing exams



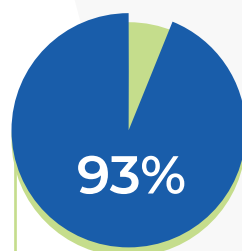
Percentage of completers certified in EKG



Percentage of completers certified in Phlebotomy



Percentage of completers certified in CCMA



Percentage of completers in internships or employment

Persistence and completion:

Given the long and intensive nature of the program, with classes in the evening and full days on the weekend over one year, together with the challenges facing the student population of low-wage English language learners with unstable employment, the persistence and completion outcomes were outstanding.

- 100% of students completed the ESOL bridge, and all but one transitioned to the medical assistant course (the individual who did not transition began an academic nursing program)
- 91% completed the medical assistant training
- 100% of students that completed medical assistant training passed the National Healthcareer Association's EKG, Phlebotomy, and CCMA certification exams. These results compare favorably to any clinical medical assistant training across the City, but are even more notable given the target population of English language learners, who typically pass standardized certification exams in much lower numbers than their native English speaking peers.
- In fact, there were 28 individuals who began the program with a TABE score less than 7, which is often too low even for bridge programs, and the majority of these individuals passed all three certification exams.

Instructor and Curriculum Quality:

On student evaluation forms, between 90% and 100% of students in each cohort agreed or strongly agreed that their instructor was prepared, had a clear and engaging teaching style, was responsive, provided extra help as needed, and provided helpful course materials. Similarly, between 90% and 100% of students in each cohort felt that they learned and developed factual knowledge, communication skills, teamwork skills, resource finding skills, and critical thinking skills through the program.

Internship Placement:

Thirty-seven of the 40 students who completed the training participated in internships (or were hired immediately as medical assistants.) Nineteen healthcare institutions across the City participated as internship sites, including CityMD, Northwell Health, Mount Sinai Health System, NYC Health + Hospitals, Charles B. Wang Community Health Center, Urban Health Plan, and Community Healthcare Network.

Employment:

Eighty-five percent of job seekers, translating to 23 students, ultimately gained employment as medical assistants and had an average wage gain of 33%.



“Being bilingual myself, the ability to identify new leaders for our organization who are also bilingual is really exciting. The individual we hired was prepared for real-life situations and clinical skills, which aligns with our vision and mission at CityMD to build a kinder, healthier community.”

– Miguel Fernandez, Medical Assistant Corporate Trainer, CityMD



LEARNINGS AND RECCOMENDATIONS FOR THE FIELD

This is a highly successful program that met target outcomes while also serving a population with barriers to higher education and employment. Education and training programs designed to position bilingual job seekers to succeed in today's healthcare environment and be equipped with the core competencies are needed now more than ever.



4 Key Elements

The four key elements of delivering occupational training in healthcare for English Language Learners to meet the demand for bilingual workers are:

1

an assessment and screening process that effectively identifies candidates who are most likely to succeed in the training and medical assistant role

2

a bridge that is connected and seamlessly integrated directly to skills training

3

ESOL bridge training that is contextualized for the occupation

4

relevant medical terminology taught in one's native language in addition to English throughout the skills training

Integrated ESOL

Content throughout the medical assistant training curriculum was crucial to student success and confidence. Even with making English language gains during the bridge training, students still reported struggling with the content and pace of the course and in feeling confident with their English language skills. Contextualized ESOL content *throughout* the medical assistant curriculum was critical in maximizing student uptake of the material and increasing confidence levels in their English language skills.

The below best practices emerged from the Bilingual Medical Assistant Training Program and are recommended to successfully deliver an integrated ESOL healthcare training model:

Employer engagement:

- Engage employers from day one of the program, including building internship affiliation agreements four to five months before the start of internships.
 - Identify specific priority language needs with employer partners in order to target and tailor recruitment efforts.
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Assessment, recruiting, and screening:

- Ensure that the ESOL bridge is co-located with the occupational training to minimize the burden of travel on students and employers and to improve coordination.
 - Ensure that students test at the appropriate reading level to pass certification exams- in this case, students should TABE at a 6th grade reading level or above.
 - Allot ample time to the marketing, recruitment, and screening process as this is a multi-step process and it takes time to get the word out.
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Supporting completion and persistence:

- Include adequate tutoring hours during the occupational training portion of the program to assist students who fall behind and ease the transition from the ESOL bridge to the occupational training.
- Ensure the medical terminology in the native language courses are early enough in the training to correspond with the medical terminology section in English, in order to assist students with comprehension during the rest of the course.

ABOUT NYACH

NYACH is an industry partnership at the NYC Department of Small Business Services focused on building an effective, integrated, and accessible healthcare workforce development ecosystem in NYC. To do this, NYACH convenes key players in the healthcare industry to identify employer needs and workforce trends, helps education and training organizations adapt their approach to better meet those needs, and builds accessible onramps and community pipelines to ensure low-income and unemployed New Yorkers have access to viable career pathways in healthcare. NYACH is supported by the NYC Workforce Funders and JP Morgan Chase Foundation. For more information, please go to <http://nyachnyc.org/>.

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