



Community College

Press Information

For press information, please contact:

- Elizabeth Streich at (718) 482-6131 estreich@lagcc.cuny.edu

New Program Trains Immigrant New Yorkers As Bilingual Medical Assistants, Helps Area Hospitals Better Serve Diverse Patient Populations

Program supports new career opportunities and allows patients to receive care in their native languages

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[LaGuardia Community College](#)/CUNY (“LaGuardia”) and the [NYC Department of Small Business Services](#) (“SBS”) today announced that 41 participants have graduated from the first class of a new Bilingual Medical Assistant Training Program, which provides immigrant New Yorkers with a path to a new career. The program trains English language learners to use their native language skills and cultural knowledge to ease communication between health care providers and patients. In addition to learning how to administer blood draws, EKGs, and other essential tasks of a medical assistant, participants learn the core competencies needed to serve as a member of a clinical team providing [patient-centered care](#), a model of personalized, coordinated care that’s emphasized under today’s health care system.

The Bilingual Medical Assistant Training Program was launched earlier this year as a partnership between LaGuardia, SBS and its [New York Alliance for Careers in Healthcare](#) (“NYACH”) industry partnership. It was inspired by [feedback from healthcare organizations across the city](#), which indicated the need for a more diverse workforce able to serve patients with limited English proficiency. Just [51% of New Yorkers speak only English at home](#); the most common non-English languages spoken in NYC are Cantonese, Mandarin, and Spanish. More than half of the 41 graduates of the first cohort speak Spanish. Additional languages spoken by members of the first cohort include Bahasa, Bengali, Cantonese, French, Hindi, Indonesian, Mandarin, Portuguese, and Urdu.

Medical assistants are increasingly important members of care teams, with growing responsibilities that include patient education, record-keeping, and more, according to a [report issued last month by NYACH](#).

The program is offered tuition-free, due to funding from SBS and [Robin Hood](#). With no cost to participants, the program is designed to reach underemployed and unemployed New Yorkers. Starting employees typically earn \$15-19/hour and work full-time hours.

“Providing new pathways to employment for New Yorkers of any background, is a cornerstone of what we do here — especially for low-income, recent immigrant, and otherwise disadvantaged New Yorkers, who make up the majority of our [student population](#),” said LaGuardia Community College [President Gail O. Mellow](#). “We know that New Yorkers who

speaking limited English have fewer job options. As a result, many are underemployed or unemployed (nearly one-third of the first cohort were unemployed before the program). This program provides them with a solid pathway to a steady job.”

“The millions of immigrants that call New York City home should have every opportunity to make it here,” said Gregg Bishop, Commissioner of the NYC Department of Small Business Services. “Through the Bilingual Medical Assistant Training Program, we’re helping foreign—born New Yorkers overcome obstacles, gain valuable skill sets, and connect to secure career paths.”

Curriculum & Program Model of Bilingual Medical Assistant Training Program Designated as a Best Practice for Replication Across The City University of New York’s (CUNY) by NYACH & SBS

“LaGuardia Community College has a deep and proven expertise in helping non-native English speakers expand their English language skills, especially through instruction contextualized for specific occupations, and in providing quality medical assistant training,” said Hannah Weinstock, Executive Director of Workforce Development within LaGuardia Community College’s [Division of Adult and Continuing Education](#). “Medical assistants are key members of the patient care team and the ongoing transformation of the US health care delivery system requires that they be equipped with additional skills and competencies, which we have integrated into our enhanced curriculum.”

The Bilingual Medical Assistant Training Program curriculum includes advanced English language instruction delivered in part at [SBS’ Washington Heights Workforce1 Career Center](#), where other integrated services tailored to this population were also offered. Students then transitioned to medical assistant training that included medical vocabulary in participants’ native languages, administrative medical office skills, clinical skills including EKG and phlebotomy, and NYACH’s identified core competencies including patient-centered communication, interdisciplinary teamwork, cultural competence, health coaching, care coordination, and more. In order to graduate, students were required to pass the [National Healthcareer Association’s EKG, Phlebotomy, and Certified Clinical Medical Assistant certifications](#), and complete a 100-hour competency-based internship program where they receive clinical experience.

Outcomes have been superb. Of students in the two pilot cohorts, over 90% completed the more than 500-hour year-long evening and weekend training, and 100% of those that completed the program passed the national certification exams in CPR, EKG, Phlebotomy, and Certified Clinical Medical Assisting.

The high-quality training was noticed by hiring managers. A representative of employer-partner [Community Healthcare Network](#) commented, “When I interviewed students for the internships, I was inspired and impressed by their resumes and life experiences... [They were] a special group of people with a lot of drive and talent. It is a great opportunity for us to host them and we are happy to provide some transition from education to practice.”

The students are extremely grateful for the opportunity. Recent graduate Xuanmei Zhang wanted to pursue a job in the medical field. But as a new-immigrant struggling to make ends meet, investing her limited funds in a training program seemed too risky. So when she learned of the tuition-free Bilingual Medical Assistant Training Program, she jumped at the chance to apply to it.

“I have to support myself and there is no extra money that I can spend on things if I am not sure it is valuable. I decided to start this program because I did not need to worry about tuition. The only thing I needed to do was put my efforts to try and change my career,” said Xuanmei, who arrived in the US in 2010 from China where she had worked for a textile company. “Our class was intensive and it was not easy. However, my classmates and I persevered and we received all the national certifications. Through the program, I secured an internship at [Charles B. Wang](#), a Chinese community health center. They recently offered me a full-time job starting at \$18 an hour, which I’ll start in January 2018, and I can’t wait!

Not only has this program allowed me to change my career, but it's also encouraged me to pursue higher education—I recently enrolled at LaGuardia to pursue a nursing degree.”



About NYACH

NYACH is an industry partnership, bringing together multiple stakeholders of the healthcare workforce development system in order to address the industry's rapidly changing labor force needs. NYACH is a public-private partnership between the NYC Department of Small Business Services, the Workforce Funders, and JP Morgan Chase Foundation. For more information, visit nyachnyc.org.

About Robin Hood

Robin Hood, New York's largest poverty-fighting organization, finds, funds and creates over 200 of the most effective programs, to help 1.8 million New Yorkers learn and earn their way out of poverty.

About the Department of Small Business Services (SBS)

SBS helps unlock economic potential and create economic security for all New Yorkers by connecting New Yorkers to good jobs, creating stronger businesses, and building a fairer economy in neighborhoods across the five boroughs. For more information on all SBS services, go to nyc.gov/sbs, call 311, and follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#).

About LaGuardia Community College

LaGuardia Community College located in Long Island City, Queens, educates more than 50,000 New Yorkers annually through degree, certificate, and continuing education programs. Our guiding principle **Dare To Do More** reflects our belief in the transformative power of education—not just for individuals, but for our community and our country—creating pathways for achievement and safeguarding the middle class. LaGuardia is a national voice on behalf of community colleges, where half of all US college students study. Part of the City University of New York (CUNY), the College reflects the legacy of our namesake, Fiorello H. LaGuardia, the former NYC mayor beloved for his championing the underserved. Since our doors opened in 1971, our programs regularly become national models for pushing boundaries to give people of all backgrounds access to a high quality, affordable college education. We invite you to join us in imagining what our students, our community, and our country can become. Visit <http://www.LaGuardia.edu> to learn more.

