

CareerSTAT

**FRONTLINE WORKER  
EMERGING CHAMPION**

 **National Fund**  
for Workforce Solutions



# UNION HEALTH CENTER

**NEW YORK, NEW YORK**

Union Health Center (UHC) provides primary and specialty care services for union members in the greater New York City area. Partnering primarily with the Service Employees International Union and 32 Buildings and Janitors, UHC provides healthcare services to many of New York City's essential workers and their families.

## Fostering a Culture of Learning, Teaching, and Teamwork

As a patient-centered medical home, UHC treats many patients with chronic illnesses like diabetes and high blood pressure. Patients with these diseases need education on how to self-manage their care, and providers must be prepared to answer their questions. UHC saw an opportunity to improve patient care by investing in the skills and education of frontline workers.

When Monica Guillen was hired at UHC as a medical assistant (MA) in 2005, she spent her first few weeks shadowing another MA. She benefited from a UHC program begun that year to train and certify MAs in the basics of chronic disease management, including diabetes care. Guillen appreciated being exposed to new skills and techniques she hadn't learned in school — and receiving paid time on the job to step up her education.

“The person who trained me showed me step by step what we needed to do to take care of our patients and assist the providers,” Guillen says. “I quickly realized that UHC had a culture of learning, teaching, and teamwork. The more questions patients asked me, the more I wanted to learn.”

Over time, UHC refined its health coach training curricula to intentionally extend a career ladder for MAs. This program provides employees with opportunities to learn new skills in areas such as active listening and to earn more money as patient care guides and educators. Guillen has since scaled that ladder, serving as UHC health coach, as floor supervisor, and now as clinical operations manager. Guillen says she stays connected with patients she met during her earlier years on the job.

**“I quickly realized that UHC had a culture of learning, teaching, and teamwork. The more questions patients asked me, the more I wanted to learn.”**

### Monica Guillen

Medical Assistant, UHC

“Climbing the career ladder was empowering and taught me I could evolve and do more with my career and help patients,” Guillen says. She adds that other MAs find it motivating to see colleagues promoted.

## Building Frontline Competency and Advancement Opportunities

UHC leaders knew its MA curriculum needed to provide trainees with income and time for learning. Today, MAs receive protected, paid time during their standard work schedule to learn about chronic conditions (e.g., asthma, hyperlipidemia, hypertension, and obesity), health maintenance, and self-management support techniques for patients.

## Impact STAT

Due to its collective workforce development efforts, UHC's team member turnover rate dropped from **15% in 2020** to about **2% in 2024**.

“With onsite continuing education on chronic diseases our medical assistants increase their knowledge, enhance their clinical skills and are an integral part of the Health Care Team in providing patient care,” says Sharon Rimler, director of clinical services.

**“Getting opportunities to grow professionally and earn more money has been great for me and my growing family,” Carrasco says. “I didn’t expect to work here as long as I have. But the culture and the way things are done here make it fun to come to work.”**

**Luis Carrasco**  
Medical Assistant, UHC

Luis Carrasco, who started working as an MA at UHC in 2010, took advantage of this chance to grow in his career. Following the example of Guillen, Carrasco climbed the career ladder, becoming a health coach and, more recently, a team supervisor.

“Getting opportunities to grow professionally and earn more money has been great for me and my growing family,” Carrasco says. “I didn’t expect to work here as long as I have. But the culture and the way things are done here make it fun to come to work.”

## Meeting Patients Where They Are

UHC leadership also realized that a diverse patient population benefits from a more diverse health provider workforce. They sought to better match frontline workers with UHC’s pool of patients, which mostly come from a largely Spanish-speaking population of New York City-area residents and workers.

UHC actively seeks out diverse candidates through internal and external referrals and postings on various job boards. This is a winning strategy. Data show that more patients are willing to get care for chronic conditions and are becoming better at disease management.

“We saw that our patients reacted positively to receiving instruction from an MA who could speak their language, meet them at their level of knowledge about their chronic condition, and dedicate some individual time to them,” says Audrey Lum, UHC’s chief clinical officer.



CareerSTAT is a healthcare sector strategy of the National Fund for Workforce Solutions rooted in the power of peer-learning. Through a national network, members share workforce development innovation, best practices, and outcome-based initiatives to support frontline healthcare workers to build skills and careers to achieve family-sustaining wages.