



UNINSURED AND COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTERS

COVID-19 has exposed the weaknesses in many of our systems – and health care is at the top of that list. As the pandemic forced the closing of all but essential businesses, hundreds of thousands of Ohioans lost their jobs. Because many of those people had health insurance tied to their employment, they are now uninsured. There are options for families who have lost their insurance due to unemployment, but for most families, the cost of private health insurance is prohibitive.

Ohio's Community Health Centers (CHCs) are filling a large void in rural and urban communities by providing high-quality accessible health care to low-income individuals and families regardless of their ability to pay or insurance status. CHCs provide care to vulnerable individuals who face cultural and economic barriers that make many afraid to come forward and access health care. And as we move forward in navigating the pandemic, we must ensure that CHCs

have the resources and equipment they need to keeping Ohioans healthy and safe.

Community Health Centers educate parents on the importance of preventive care, timely immunizations, and well child checkups. During the pandemic, CHCs have adopted telehealth for medical, dental, and behavioral health services. They also support Ohioans who may need to transition from employer-sponsored coverage to other options like Medicaid or the Health Insurance Marketplace.

Like all providers on the front line, Ohio's CHCs are playing their part to not only manage overall health care needs, but to also play a critical role in public health. The historic CARES Act included more than \$1.3 billion for the 1,387 community health centers nationwide as part of the pandemic response. Centers receiving these funds may use the awards to help their communities detect COVID-19; to prevent, diagnose, and treat COVID-19; and to maintain or increase

capacity and staffing levels to address the public health emergency. Through the legislation, 51 Ohio health centers were awarded a total of \$40,779,480 in supplemental funding.

However, many CHCs struggle to secure and maintain the needed protective supplies and equipment. As federal funding for testing is distributed to CHCs, we recommend the state strategically direct and prioritize the needed PPE and testing kits to the Centers. Further, Ohio's CHCs play a critical role in addressing our state's disproportionately negative health outcomes among the poor and racial and ethnic minority communities.

As the stay-at-home order is lifted and Ohio moves towards recovery, CHCs will be handling a backlog of primary care needs delayed during the virus while meeting the needs of the growing numbers of uninsured. CHCs will naturally find themselves at the forefront of testing, contact tracing, and vaccination campaigns that must be conducted at the community level. What's more, Centers will continue to provide integrated whole person care, oftentimes providing dental, behavioral health, pharmacy, vision and other needed supplemental services so that Ohio's most vulnerable can keep their health on track.

CHCs are open for business, we need to keep them that way!

Ohio Should Seek To:

- *Maintain the expansion of telehealth beyond the state of emergency;*
- *Preserve Medicaid coverage and services;*
- *Protect the 340B program to keep drug prices affordable; and*
- *Preserve and expand as appropriate the Ohio Primary Care Workforce Initiative.*