



Hawai'i Primary Care Association Agenda for Health:

Community Health Center Legislative Priorities for 2009-10

Hawai'i has a network of 14 independent nonprofit community health centers (CHCs) that plays an increasingly important role in Hawai'i's healthcare delivery system. CHCs see everyone who comes to them for care, but they specialize in caring for people who have complex medical and access problems. The people served by Hawai'i's CHCs in 2007 - totaling 110,000 - disproportionately included Native Hawaiians, recent immigrants, the homeless, and the elderly. The great majority were impoverished and either uninsured or covered by Med-QUEST.

Our **Agenda for Health 2009** includes funding and policy items necessary to ensure that our community health centers can care for people in need and reduce the stress on emergency rooms and hospitals for uncompensated care.

Caring for the Uninsured

An estimated 80,000-100,000 non-elderly adults in Hawai'i do not have health insurance because of the high cost of health insurance premiums and the limits of eligibility for publicly-subsidized coverage. This number is increasing due to our weak economy and rising joblessness rate.

Low-income patients not covered by QUEST (because of immigrant status or homelessness, as well as those who can't afford health insurance premiums but aren't poor enough to qualify for Med-QUEST coverage), are most likely to seek and receive care at a community health center. Health centers provide needed medical, dental, and behavioral health services and prescription drugs. The state's network of 14 health centers expects to have 45,000 uninsured visits next year.

Community Health Centers are requesting \$4.3 million for FY 2009-10 to meet the needs of the uninsured. This is \$1 million more than DOH base funds, which have remained at the same level since 2005. The number of uninsured people CHCs serve has grown by 16% since 2005.

CHCs can only meet new and continuing needs with an increased state subsidy. This subsidy amounts to only 1/3rd of the cost of the services that are provided.

Prescriptive Authority for Psychologists

Behavioral health care is an increasingly essential service provided by CHCs, both because other options for such help are unavailable for underserved communities and because other health services are ineffective when coexisting mental health needs go unaddressed. The primary care focus of CHC services, the limited availability of mental health professionals, and the realities of sparse funding all point to our need for an expanded capacity for psychologists.

Psychologists who complete a special post-doctoral psycho-pharmaceutical training program are better able to manage prescriptions for their behavioral health patients than primary care physicians. Granting prescriptive authority to this elite class of psychologists will greatly enhance the ability of CHCs to meet the needs of their communities.

Community Health Centers ask that the legislature grant prescriptive authority over a specified formulary to psychologists who have met rigorous training and testing requirements. Such prescribing psychologists will practice only in formal collaboration with a physician and at an FQHC.

Dental Licensing

Access to dental care for people covered by the Medicaid program is extremely limited. This is especially troubling for the 100,000 children enrolled in the program. Starting in 2009, an established Community Health Center-based dental residency program in Hawai'i plans to expand to offer a pediatric specialty training program. Completion of this specialty training will take two years or more; accordingly, the temporary Hawai'i dental license that covers many newly graduated dentists needs to accommodate this beneficial new initiative.

Community Health Centers ask that the legislature amend dental licensing laws so that any dentist enrolled in an American Dental Association Commission on Dental Accreditation accredited dental residency program can be granted a temporary license for the duration of the residency program.