



Hawai'i Primary Care Association

Community Health Centers and the 2008 Legislature

Community Health Centers (CHCs) are among the most essential – and largely unrecognized – parts of Hawai'i's health care system. The Centers are independent, locally-governed, nonprofit organizations that exist to take care of the “underserved” – the people who have limited access to health care because they:

- Live in areas, such as Hāna, where there are few, if any, other doctors;
- Have no insurance or are covered by Medicaid, a government program that many private doctors and dentists don't participate in;
- Have limited ability to speak English or come from a cultural base that makes using the Western medical system difficult; or
- Otherwise have special characteristics, such as homelessness, that need attention.

CHCs provide primary medical and mental health care, prescription drugs, and most offer dental services. These clinical services are supplemented with language interpretation, outreach, referrals and case management, assistance with applications for public benefits, and other services to ensure that all the conditions that keep CHC clients from better health are addressed. CHCs are important not only to their patients but to the whole health care system because their preventive care saves emergency rooms, hospitals, and insurers money.

The Legislature will be addressing several items of utmost importance to CHCs:

Funding Services for the Uninsured. As a network, CHCs care for more uninsured people than any other health provider in Hawai'i. However, they still serve only 30,000 of the estimated 110-130,000 Hawai'i residents who are uninsured. CHCs want to provide more medical, dental, and mental health services but need an additional \$2 million in state subsidies to enable them to do this. This is a particularly cost-effective investment in Hawai'i's health care system.

Med-QUEST Payment. An overwhelming proportion of CHCs services are directed to families and individuals who are below poverty and may be eligible for publicly-financed health insurance through Med-QUEST. In fact, Med-QUEST is the financial mainstay for health center funding, responsible for 40% of overall revenues. Financing CHCs in this way is good for the state because more than half of Med-QUEST funding comes from the federal government. We are seeking legislative action on state Med-QUEST payment rules because currently payments to health centers are chronically late and procedures are unclear to change rates in recognition of new services. While proposed legislation is highly technical, the bottom line is that fixing these Med-QUEST payment problems is imperative for the continuation of CHC services.

Additional bills of importance to Community Health Centers include those that will address **workforce**. CHCs have potential to be an excellent solution to Hawaii's provider shortage problem and they offer a sustainable infrastructure for loan repayment programs to recruit and retain clinicians. One of the greatest advantages that CHCs have is that the federal government provides tort claim coverage; therefore, they don't have same concerns about malpractice insurance that plague providers in private practice.

The high cost of land and building is one of the most significant barriers to the appropriate expansion of needed CHC **facilities** and services. Any legislative initiatives that address will be keenly supported by CHCs.

The Hawai'i Primary Care Association (HPCA) is a nonprofit organization, funded largely by the Bureau of Primary Health Care. Our mission is to strengthen systems of care in Hawaii for communities in need. Among the activities of the HPCA are training and peer networking; marketplace analysis and statewide strategic planning; the Hawai'i Immigrant Health Initiative; Hawai'i Covering Kids; community development; telehealth and health care technology; and community health worker training.

For more information, contact

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