



For Immediate Release

February 4, 2009

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Bi-State Primary Care Association Thanks Supporters Continued Support of Safety-Net Providers Emphasized at Legislative Event

CONCORD N.H. – There are difficult decisions to be made concerning the state budget, and the continued support of our state’s safety-net providers during New Hampshire’s fiscal crisis is both appreciated and necessary. That was the message provided by Vanessa Santarelli, Bi-State Primary Care Association’s Director of Public Policy at Bi-State Primary Care Association’s annual legislative and business breakfast, held February 4th in Concord.

Santarelli spoke before a crowd of over 200 members of the state legislature, executive branch, and business community at the annual event, which strives to focus legislative attention on the health care needs of New Hampshire’s uninsured and underserved populations.

“We deeply appreciate the efforts of our state’s decision-makers in such difficult financial times.” said Santarelli. “We know that they support the open-door policy at our state’s Community Health Centers because our centers provide comprehensive, preventive and primary care to anyone regardless of their ability to pay.”

As a resource to highlight the valuable role of primary care organizations within the state, Bi-State unveiled “The Voices and Faces of New Hampshire’s Community Health Centers,” a booklet providing the stories of various Community Health Center providers and patients. “These are real people sharing their positive experiences at our Community Health Centers. These are the faces of those who are directly affected by our state’s health care policies,” said Santarelli.

Three featured speakers at the event personalized the Community Health Center experience and reiterated Santarelli’s position: Janice Silver, a patient and current Board Chair of Avis Goodwin CHC in Dover; Dr. Fred Kelsey, M.D. a physician from Mid-State CHC in Plymouth; and Tom Clairmont, CEO of Lakes Region General Hospital in Laconia.

“I appreciate that we are living through the worst financial crisis of our lifetime and that difficult decisions must be made,” said Kelsey, “but there is a daily worry about primary care access in the American system. In 2020, 23,000 physicians will die or retire. Currently only 18,000 residents are graduating each year. This is a healthcare crisis.”

According to Kelsey, several strategies have worked to recruit primary care physicians. One is New Hampshire’s loan repayment program. “Six physicians who work at Mid-State Community Health Center are involved in that program,” said Kelsey. “I ask that you support the loan reimbursement program...and the primary care system itself.”

“The role of Community Health Centers in the success of our state’s health care system cannot be overestimated,” said Silver, a breast cancer survivor. “It is because I had access to high quality and affordable healthcare [provided by Avis Goodwin], that being a Community Health Center patient literally saved my life.”

According to Tess Kuenning, Bi-State's Executive Director, New Hampshire's 14 community health centers at over 30 sites are a medical home to over 106,000 people in New Hampshire (or 1 in 12 state citizens). New Hampshire's Community Health Centers employ over 900 people statewide, often as a major employer in their area, and contribute more than \$61 million into their local economies. Studies also show that health centers save Medicaid 30 percent per beneficiary per year. "We are extremely pleased that our Governor, legislators, members of the executive branch and public policy leaders recognize the Community Health Centers' contribution to New Hampshire's overall health – our physical health and our state fiscal health."

Panelists echoed Kuenning's statement and urged legislators and economic development advocates to recognize the vital role community health centers play in the state's economy. "The continued support of New Hampshire's Community Health Centers plays a crucial role in the economic development of the communities they serve," said Clairmont. "It's a growth industry...I hope these insights help you to consider the future and where we need to go."

Community Health Centers are nonprofit health care practices that have a mission to provide primary care regardless of their patients' ability to pay or insurance status. CHCs provide care to people of all ages with services including comprehensive primary and preventive care, 24-hour coverage, obstetrical and gynecological care, dental care, mental health and substance abuse services, pharmacy, laboratory and other ancillary services, and enabling services such as case management, translation services, and transportation.

"We're the best kept secret in health care," said Helen Taft, CEO of Families First Health and Support Center in Portsmouth. "It's time to get the word out."

Bi-State Primary Care Association is a private, nonprofit membership organization whose mission is to foster the delivery of primary and preventive health services to the people of New Hampshire with special emphasis on the medically underserved. For more information concerning New Hampshire's Community Health Centers or Bi-State, visit www.bistatepca.org.

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