

Op Ed on National Health Center Week
Celebrating America's Health Centers: Transforming Health Care
in Our Local Communities
August 13, 2013

National Health Center Week, August 11-17, is an annual celebration of America's Community Health Centers and a time to raise awareness of their shared mission to provide high-quality primary and preventive health care that is accessible to all. This year's theme is "Transforming Health Care in Our Local Communities," which highlights how well Community Health Centers adapt, improve, and innovate to meet the changing health care needs of the communities they serve. New Hampshire's Community Health Centers will host a variety of free community events over the next several weeks, including block parties and health center tours, to raise awareness of the primary and preventive care services available locally. New Hampshire's Community Health Centers provide a wide range of services to more than 122,000 people, regardless of insurance coverage or ability to pay.

Community Health Centers are nonprofit organizations that provide access to medical, dental, behavioral health care, substance abuse counseling, and pharmacy services. They are staffed by experienced and compassionate doctors, advanced practice registered nurses, nurse practitioners, dentists, dental hygienists, licensed social workers, pharmacists, and other clinical support staff. Community Health Centers have decades of experience helping patients successfully manage diabetes, hypertension, asthma, and other chronic diseases through excellent medical care, patient and family education, nutritional counseling, and the assistance of chronic care managers.

Health care reform is changing how Granite Staters access care and coverage. We urge the legislative commission currently debating whether to extend Medicaid coverage for individuals living at or below \$15,856 to recommend the Medicaid expansion. The lack of health care coverage is a large barrier to managing chronic illnesses for many of our friends and neighbors. The ability of New Hampshire's Community Health Centers to adapt to the changing health care landscape allows them to continue to provide cost-effective primary and preventive care and continue to be a reliable source of information on accessing insurance coverage.

Beginning October 1, Community Health Centers will have Certified Application Counselors on site to provide information, answer questions, and assist patients and community members enroll in health insurance through the Health Insurance Marketplace, Medicaid, or the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP).

Community Health Centers provide affordable primary and preventive care in modern, well-equipped, and conveniently located facilities and address the needs of the communities they serve by providing access to services that reduce barriers to primary and preventive care. Community Health Centers accept all major insurance plans, Medicaid, Medicare, and provide sliding fee discounts based on income to uninsured residents. To find a Community Health Center near you, visit: www.bistatepca.org and click on "Find a Health Center."