

Building Access to Quality Health Care, One Community at a Time

Community Health Center Initiatives

Office of Community Programs

Improving public health by providing health care in the neighborhood

Can you imagine the impact on public health in Massachusetts if community health centers did not exist? How would the health needs of low- and moderate-income people, who may not have health insurance or who live significant distances from medical centers, be addressed? Thankfully, because of local community health centers (CHCs), this is becoming less of a public health risk. Community health centers in Massachusetts administer over two million visits annually, including a wide range of primary, mental health and dental care services and school-based health programs to anyone in need, regardless of insurance status or ability to pay.

One in ten Massachusetts residents receives their medical care from a CHC. By delivering culturally appropriate health care and prevention services to some of the state's most underserved residents, the CHC promotes health and prevents disease, thus assuring that the most vulnerable populations have access to cost-effective care. This approach provides quality and cost-effective health care and an improved quality of life.

Before the community health center movement in the 1960s, accessible health services for low- and moderate-income citizens were difficult to find. Where services did exist, they were often characterized by long travel and waiting times, sporadic and inefficient care and, in the worst instances, disrespectful treatment of patients. Since 1965, Massachusetts has utilized CHCs as the backbone of its publicly supported health care system to meet the needs of the underserved. The Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers is the statewide professional association devoted to the development and promotion of the CHC in serving underserved communities in Massachusetts, providing leadership through advocacy and technical assistance.

In the mid-1990s a variety of communities that had not been part of the earlier phases of the CHC movement came onboard. At that time Massachusetts Medicaid (MassHealth) and the University of Massachusetts Medical School's Commonwealth Medicine division called on the Office of Community Programs (OCP) for assistance in establishing new service sites. Together we worked to establish new community health centers across the state to expand citizens'

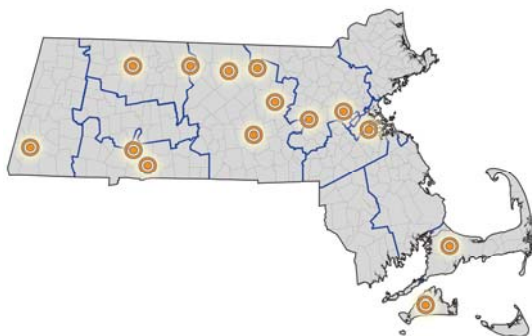
access to health care. OCP has been instrumental in the establishment of federally qualified community health centers and their programs in various Massachusetts geographic areas. In this endeavor, OCP works closely with other parts of the Medical School and Commonwealth Medicine. In particular, the Department of Family Medicine and Community Health, has been a longstanding champion of CHC and the services they provide, and the Center for Health Policy and Research has collaborated on a variety of CHC-related policy and program efforts.

Making a Difference Across the Commonwealth

The Community Health Center Initiative supported by the Office of Community Programs serves various and diverse populations and provides culturally appropriate care in both urban neighborhoods and rural areas, regardless of patients' insurance status or ability to pay. Each center provides primary medical care under the supervision of a clinician and, since the community health centers are either federally qualified, or function as a "look-alike" CHC, a majority of each board is required to represent community members. As a result, these centers are truly and uniquely responsive to community needs.

Key to the establishment and continuity of the CHC program is the infrastructure development support that is provided by OCP for both the health centers and dental programs. This financial support provides a boost to newly-formed programs, enabling them to quickly get to work providing the health care services the community needs. This funding is allocated in two ways:

- **CHC Infrastructure Development:** Provides support for new CHC start-ups to serve as safety net providers for MassHealth and uninsured populations. Infrastructure funding is an initial, one-time award that helps stabilize new centers or sites in the first year of operation.
- **Dental Infrastructure Development:** Assists community-based organizations in developing dental services in local clinics, school or mobile units; funding is for start-up capital and recruiting staff.



Community Health Center locations that have been supported by or have worked with the Office of Community Programs.

Highlighted below are the community health centers with which OCP has worked closely:

Community Health Program Health Center (CHP Health Center) has a 30-year history of serving the health needs of infants, children, adults, and senior citizens. As the only community health care provider in the area, CHP Health Center has addressed the serious lack of access to perinatal care in **Southern and Central Berkshire County** and beyond. OCP awarded funds for CHC infrastructure development, dental equipment services, and the Children's Health Program.



Community Health Connections Family Health Center of Fitchburg (FHCF) provides quality, comprehensive health care and social services to all residents of North Central Massachusetts and beyond. OCP awarded funds to FHCF for CHC and Dental Infrastructure Development. OCP also awarded funds for the **Gardner Community Health Center** satellite to provide mental health staffing and to develop its new building. Funds were also awarded to develop the CHC dental infrastructure and to provide consultants offering technical expertise during the planning of the Gardner site.

Desmond Callan Community Health Center, formerly known as the ***Community Health Center of Franklin County***, in Turner Falls, MA is a rural CHC with both medical and dental practices. It promotes the county's well-being while providing access to comprehensive preventive and primary care services to all residents of the greater Franklin County area. OCP also awarded funds to the CHC to support dental infrastructure development and to the **Athol/Orange** satellite for CHC infrastructure development.

Harbor Health Services, Inc. in Dorchester includes the **Geiger-Gibson Community Health Center**, which opened in 1965 as the nation's first community health center. Harbor Health Services includes the **Mid- to Upper-Cape Community Health Center**, which was awarded funds by OCP to establish dental services on Cape Cod and Martha's Vineyard. OCP also awarded funds to develop the CHC infrastructure and to add oral surgery services, equipment and school-based services.

Great Brook Valley Health Center (GBVHC) in Worcester has provided high quality, comprehensive health care to the

Worcester community and beyond for 34 years. In Fiscal Year 2006 the center served 23,836 people from more than 100 cities and towns. Of those individuals, 83 percent were from minority communities and 64 percent had no health insurance. GBVHC prides itself on its multicultural, multilingual staff of approximately 300 people who speak 22 different languages. OCP awarded funds to GBVHC to cover construction costs for its **Clinton satellite** and its dental office, which serves more than 2,284 people each year. Start-up funds were also awarded to establish a new community health center in Framingham and to develop case management functions. Since it opened in April 2004, the **Framingham Health Center** has been visited by nearly 5,000 people.



Caring Health Center, formerly known as **Springfield Southwest Community Health Center**, is the only freestanding, community-controlled health care center in the Springfield area providing primary and preventive health care to residents of its southwest area. OCP awarded funds to develop the CHC infrastructure, establish dental services and renovate its medical laboratory.

Holyoke Health Center (HHC) has been offering highly-skilled primary medical and oral health care to its patients and community residents for over 30 years. Approximately 16,000 people, speaking multiple languages, visit the Holyoke Health Center each year for medical and dental care. These people are insured and uninsured, young and old, low-income and wealthy. While most patients live in Holyoke, care is provided to people from Amherst, Springfield, the Berkshires, and other towns and cities throughout Massachusetts. OCP awarded funds to HHC for CHC and Dental Infrastructure Development. HHC opened another health center to provide medical care in Chicopee, in a highly transient neighborhood of poor and working class families, including many new immigrants. OCP awarded funds to support construction costs for the **Chicopee satellite** and to develop new health programs, including oral surgery services for MassHealth members.

Joseph M. Smith Community Health Center is a non-profit organization whose mission is to provide access to comprehensive, culturally competent and affordable primary care services and selected specialties to all families and individuals in the Allston/Brighton/Waltham area and surrounding communities, regardless of circumstance. OCP

awarded infrastructure funds for the **Waltham** site to implement and expand their electronic medical record system and renovate the triage area at the health center.

Results

Today, 52 community health center organizations provide care to one of every ten Massachusetts residents at 184 sites across the Commonwealth.

In Massachusetts, community health centers care for about 43 percent of the Commonwealth's medically underserved, defined as Medicaid-eligible and low-income uninsured and underinsured. Approximately 40 percent are insured by Medicaid (MassHealth), another 40 percent are uninsured and underinsured, and fewer than 20 percent are insured by Medicare or commercial insurance. Despite ongoing challenges and daunting financial pressures, community health centers are holding strong to their original mission, guided by their founding values.

Looking Toward the Future

Because of their unique position in the community, CHCs monitor the needs of their particular area and provide the care and services that are most urgently required, regardless of patients' insurance status or ability to pay. The health centers are an essential component of the community, and we recognize the critical role they play in addressing the public health needs of Massachusetts. OCP will continue to partner with state agencies and programs, such as MassHealth, to establish community health centers and improve health care access for Massachusetts citizens. OCP will also maintain its partnership with the Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers to promote accessible, high-quality, community-responsive health care that ensures the successful continuation of the CHC movement.

About the Office of Community Programs (OCP)

As part of the University of Massachusetts Medical School's Commonwealth Medicine division, the Office of Community Programs (OCP) serves as a vital bridge between the knowledge and resources of the Medical School and health care programs in local communities. Our dedicated staff works closely with state Medicaid programs, government agencies and community-based organizations to identify areas where there may be barriers to care. Based on Best Practices and the latest health policy information, we then develop strategic, practical solutions for the development and implementation of community-based health care programs and services. As a result, OCP implements innovative health care services and educational programs to more communities. These services and programs include:

- Community Health Center Initiatives
- Dental Services, Training and Capacity Building
- New England AIDS Education and Training Center
- MassHealth Training Forum
- Cross Cultural Initiatives
- Community Service and Service Learning

Message from Michael Huppert, M.P.H., Director and Associate Dean, Office of Community Programs

Community health centers are a critically important part of the fabric of providing health care services for all citizens. Their numerous locations make them accessible and convenient for the many people who need them. CHCs are managed by the people they serve, and their boards are comprised of both consumers and health leaders. The centers provide care to the most vulnerable populations in Massachusetts – those who are uninsured or who may have trouble paying for health insurance. I am proud of the Office of Community Programs' role in supporting the establishment of many centers in Massachusetts and look forward to continuing to be a partner with them in statewide public health initiatives.

I also want to acknowledge a number of organizations who have worked tirelessly to develop a network of excellent community health centers in Massachusetts. OCP is grateful to these champions for their dedication to community based care and for their advocacy and support.

- University of Massachusetts Medical School and Commonwealth Medicine

- Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers
- Office of Medicaid
- Office of Acute and Ambulatory Care, Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Services
- Department of Family Medicine and Community Health, UMass Medical School
- Center for Health Policy and Research, Commonwealth Medicine
- Massachusetts Department of Public Health
- Division of Health Care Finance & Policy

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