

The Gilead Outreach and Referral Center is a not-for-profit organization that connects low-income uninsured individuals and families with existing health care services for which they are eligible. Community Health Centers are a vital part of the Gilead Center's work.



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The Gilead Center is a project of United Power for Action and Justice.

July 2003

Your Guide to Community Health Centers

From the Gilead Outreach and Referral Center

What are Community Health Centers?

Community Health Centers (CHCs) are a vital link to health care for insured and uninsured individuals who have problems getting needed health care services. By law, CHCs provide a broad range of primary and preventive health services at affordable rates. Their mission is to improve the health of communities that do not have ready access to health care.

Officially known as Federally Qualified Health Centers, CHCs receive funding from the Bureau of Primary Health Care (BPHC), a division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. CHCs also receive funds from Medicare, Medicaid, private insurance and grants.

CHCs serve both rural and urban areas throughout the U.S. The State of Illinois has 180 CHC health care delivery sites. CHCs serve over 600,000 patients in Illinois annually. More than 350,000 of those patients live in Cook County.

CHCs are directly involved with the communities they serve. Users of the health center comprise at least 51 percent of each health center's board of directors. Local business owners, civic officials, representatives of faith-based organizations and other community leaders fill the remaining board positions.

Collaboration with local health care and social service providers is another important CHC characteristic. Many CHCs work directly with

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substance abuse. Each CHC has a referral relationship with one or more local hospitals for patients who require hospitalization.

Unlike some other health care providers, many CHCs offer patients access to multiple services at a single location. This “one-stop” approach reduces the need for multiple appointments and lessens time away from work or family. Dental and prescription drug services are examples of additional services offered at some CHCs. Some also offer services such as job search/placement and literacy programs. A number of CHCs help patients enroll in programs like KidCare, WIC and Medicaid.

All CHCs are required by law to employ physicians who are board-certified or board-eligible. To become board-eligible, doctors must complete a three-year residency of concentrated study in their area of expertise after completing medical school. Once a physician finishes residency training, he or she is eligible to take an examination and becomes board-certified upon passing the exam and meeting other specified requirements. Other CHC staff, including nurses, dentists, and health educators are required to be licensed and certified as appropriate under state law.

community organizations to conduct outreach and health education programs that build trust with community residents. Community outreach workers explain what CHCs are, what services they offer, what they will cost and encourage community members to visit. Such partnerships help bring services to communities in need of affordable, quality health care.

Who do Community Health Centers serve?

Many low-income families are unable to obtain affordable, quality health care. Lack of health insurance and difficulty locating doctors who will serve them are common obstacles for those seeking care. Some individuals go without health care because they have trouble communicating with health care staff. Others, especially working parents, have problems finding health care for their families after usual business hours.

Community Health Centers (CHCs) provide health care in communities where health services are lacking. They serve groups that have trouble finding care. CHCs provide equal access to all residents, regardless of their financial, immigration or insurance status. No one is turned away because of their inability to pay for health care services.

The patient population served by CHCs is diverse and varies from community to community. However, most patients are members of low-income, working families, especially women and children who belong to a

racial or ethnic minority and are either uninsured or covered by Medicaid.

CHCs are often located in communities with large immigrant populations. The U.S. health care system is usually very different from those in the immigrants' native countries. Immigrants have to learn how to navigate the complex U.S. health care system, and language and cultural differences can cause communication problems. A number of CHCs have bilingual health care providers or translation services to help immigrant patients. Because of the diverse populations they serve and their community-oriented boards, CHCs emphasize the development of services and programs that respect cultural diversity.

Where are Community Health Centers located?

Community Health Centers (CHCs) structure services according to the needs of their patients. These needs include convenient locations, accommodating appointments and flexible hours. Many CHCs are accessible by public transportation and a few even offer transportation services for patients. While some CHCs prefer that patients schedule an appointment, walk-ins are generally welcome. Because low-income working families cannot go to the doctor during usual business hours, many CHCs have extended weekday hours and/or provide services on Saturdays.

How much does it cost to visit a Community Health Center?

Community Health Centers (CHCs) bill uninsured patients according to a sliding fee scale based on a patient's income and family size. Initial visits can cost as little as \$15 or less for those with little or no income, helping ensure that neither income nor lack of insurance prevent individuals from getting needed health care.

CHCs also serve patients who have health insurance. Patients with private insurance and patients enrolled in Medicaid or Medicare are billed according to those plans. As with other forms of health care, CHCs do require some documentation, typically identification and an insurance card, if available. If a patient does not have insurance, he or she must present some form of identification and proof of income.

What services do Community Health Centers offer?

Community Health Centers (CHCs) provide primary and preventive services including maternal and prenatal care, immunizations and school physicals. CHCs effectively treat many patients with chronic conditions like asthma, diabetes and hypertension. Many CHCs conduct special programs that address a variety of health issues like nutrition, HIV awareness, mental health and