

De Blasio pushes for federal health center grants



Bill de Blasio. (Rob Bennett/Mayoral Photography Office)



By Dan Goldberg 5:58 a.m. | Oct. 6, 2014

Mayor Bill de Blasio is asking the federal government to approve grant applications from 21 Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHC), which would expand health services for poor New Yorkers, a key component of the mayor's health agenda and a theme he ran on during his campaign.

FQHCs are health centers that have traditionally served the poor and uninsured, offering primary and preventive care to patients, regardless of ability to pay.

They are often found in areas with low income, large immigrant and high uninsured populations, and have been cited by public health officials as one way to reduce health inequality between income brackets.

In 2012, nearly 900,000 New York city residents visited an FQHC, and three-quarters of those lived at or below the poverty level, including 60,000 homeless, according to the mayor's office.

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Between 2007 and 2012, patient volume increased by 36 percent and the number of annual visits increased by 27 percent.

Even with the Affordable Care Act, which insured approximately 500,000 city residents in either private health insurance or Medicaid, the

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clinics cannot meet current demand, de Blasio said.

“Current capacity cannot address the ever-increasing demand for high performing, community-based primary care in New York City,” the mayor wrote, according to the letter obtained by Capital. “If awarded, this federal funding will allow (the center) to increase access to much needed comprehensive primary care and preventive services in the neighborhoods it serves.”

De Blasio's letter will be given to each FQHC that is submitting a grant application, which will be sent out this week.

The move follows up on a promise the mayor made during his campaign to expand community health centers. The mayor said he planned to create at least 16 new community health clinics in the communities of highest need and increase the efficiency and capacity of existing clinics. De Blasio's vision, [according to his campaign website](#), was to have these health centers serve an additional 500,000 patients by the end of his first term.

That's an exceedingly ambitious number. Even if every grant application were approved for the full amount, the mayor's office estimates that this would only add space for 75,000 patients.

And it is unlikely New York City will receive all that it asks.

The Department of Health and Human Services expects to award [\\$100 million](#) in New Access Point (NAP) funding during fiscal year 2015. The maximum grant is \$650,000.

That's a relatively small amount of money and the grants are extremely competitive. De Blasio is sure to be one of many politicians vying for his constituents.

Last year, the New York State received [five NAP grants](#) worth \$2.8 million, which was expected to increase services for 29,000 patients. Only two of those grants went to New York City and both were in the Bronx.

One challenge unique to the city, and true for most grants for which it applies, is \$650,000 doesn't go nearly as far in New York as it does in other parts of the country.

Setting up a new FQHC require outside investments of capital and substantial resources.

Most FQHC's would do well to think of this grant money as “icing on the cake,” said Larry McReynolds, president of Lutheran Family Health Services, which applied for the grant.

“These are competing grants and competing grants are scored on need in the area and access,” he said. “Mayors all across the country are supporting their neighborhoods and it gets down to a competitive formula ... to try to take out personal interventions.”

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