

Op-Ed Template
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When we talk about value in health care, we need to focus on the quality of care delivered to patients as well as how far each dollar spent on health care goes. Today, growing numbers of New Yorkers are frustrated by having to navigate a health care system that is disorganized, confusing, and increasingly unaffordable. What's missing from the health care debate is the growing body of evidence that shows we can address all of these problems by expanding access for more people to a patient-centered primary care medical home.

Studies show that when illnesses like diabetes, hypertension, asthma, and depression are not appropriately managed — or prevented in the first place — they account for a significant portion of the skyrocketing costs for families and the entire health care system. In a primary care medical home, doctors, nurses, and other providers work closely as a team with patients to prevent — or manage — costly chronic diseases. New York's community health centers, like [NAME OF YOUR ORGANIZATION HERE], have been leaders in showing the value of this approach as an effective way to address more needs, improve health, and contain costs.

This unique health center model allows us to save the entire health system, including the government and taxpayers, approximately \$24 billion annually by keeping patients out of costlier health care settings, such as emergency rooms. In these tough economic times, health centers are small businesses that serve as economic engines in their communities. According to the National Association of Community Health Centers (NACHC), health centers generated \$20 billion in combined economic impact in 2009 and were responsible for nearly 200,000 jobs in areas hit hardest by the recession.

Health centers are locally-controlled, non-profit entities directed by patient majority boards, which ensures that each health center is accountable and responsive to the community it serves. Health centers currently provide a health care home to 1.4 million New Yorkers at over 500 sites statewide and approximately 20 million people across the country. A long line of presidents and Members of Congress on both sides of the aisle have long-recognized the value of health centers and supported their expansion.

National Health Center Week (August 5-11, 2012) is quickly approaching, and there is no better time to celebrate the health centers that power healthier communities. To find out more about how community health centers are saving lives and dollars, visit one in your neighborhood.