



**Community Health Care Association  
of New York State**

*Defining New Directions*

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IMMEDIATE

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Over 400 community, migrant and homeless health care activists came to New York's capital yesterday for the Community Health Care Association of New York State's (CHCANYS) annual Advocacy Day. Health center activists from throughout New York told their State Legislators just how important their health centers are to the State's health care safety net.

The five key issues focused on during legislative visits were:

- **Restoring and increasing the Diagnostic and Treatment Center Indigent Care Pool** which enables health centers to be reimbursed for the care they provide to the uninsured. CHCANYS is asking for last year's 2 percent cut to be restored, to protect the pool from further cuts and to increase the pool's funding to keep up with demand.
- **Enhance the capacity of the state's primary care safety net** by restoring \$9.8 million (\$4.9M of which is the state's share) in statewide Transition funding to provide operating support for integrated electronic health records (EHR).
- **Improve access to primary care safety net providers** by supporting legislation that streamlines and improves the credentialing process to expand access to high quality, cost-effective primary care providers.
- **Bring physicians into underserved areas and to community-based settings** by supporting the Executive Budget's Doctors Across New York funding which includes funds for tuition loan repayment for physicians who commit to working in a medically underserved area and for grants for physicians locating to an underserved area.
- **Ensure access to care for migrant and seasonal farm workers** by restoring \$442,000 in funding for health centers that care for those workers.

The day was opened by newly elected CHCANYS Board President, Paloma Hernandez, the CEO of Urban Health Plan in the Bronx and Queens. "Every day our health centers deliver quality care to thousands of New Yorkers from Buffalo to Brooklyn," Hernandez said. "Each year, you serve 1.3 million people who would otherwise go without care. Be proud of what you do, be proud of who you serve, be proud to represent your health center. Let your legislators know just how proud you are."

Advocates also heard from New York State Health Commissioner Richard Daines, New York State Senate Health Committee Chair Tom Duane, New York State Assembly Health Committee Chair Richard Gottfried, Donna Frescatore, interim State Medicaid Director and Deputy Commissioner of the Department's Office of Health Insurance Program, and four patients from health centers across the state.

"Community health centers do a marvelous job in taking care of the over 2.7 million uninsured New Yorkers," said Commissioner Daines who also focused on Governor David Paterson's Executive Budget and his emphasis on childhood obesity. "We can do something about obesity, we can do something about health care costs and we can do something about the deficit."

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Senator Duane stressed the need for establishing a stronger baseline of funding for the care that community health centers provide for uninsured persons so that no matter how bad the state's economic situation, health centers would always receive the funding they need to care for patients. "It's a terrible budget year however there are still things that can be done that don't cost much—we need to continue Doctors Across New York and make it easier for people to enroll in Medicaid and Child Health Plus. When no one else will help, people can turn to community health centers and be accepted with open arms."

"It is wonderful to have an organization like CHCANYS to work with," said Assemblyman Gottfried. "It is so important that community health centers are represented by an organization that really knows what its doing. We need to learn the lessons of community health, advance the medical home concept and advance changes in the structure of our health care system."

One of the patient speakers, David Broxton, told the crowd that five years ago he was homeless, looking for food and shelter everyday and that after his first visit to Care for the Homeless, a community health center that cares for many homeless persons in New York City, his life changed. "I thought I was made of steel. I was shocked when the doctors told me I had cancer and needed my knees replaced," he said. "With the health care and support of Care for the Homeless, my knee was replaced and my cancer is in remission. I got the same quality care that Rudy Giuliani got!" Broxton is now on the Board of Directors of Care for the Homeless so he can help others with a similar story.

Another patient speaker was Carol Watts, a Board Member and patient at Oak Orchard Community Health Center in Brockport, N.Y. Watts is also one of New York's apple farmers and knows first hand the importance of Oak Orchard's two migrant health centers. "The health of our migrant farm workers is critical for New York State. Every apple on our 40,000 trees has to be picked by hand. We need our farm workers and our migrant workers to be healthy—Oak Orchard is there for us every step of the way."

Frescatore, the State's interim Medicaid Director, praised community health centers for "keeping your doors open so people didn't have to take time off from work." She also underscored the need to continue reforming the system so that more people can stay healthy with the support of Medicaid and other state-sponsored health insurance programs. "We need to improve care for the medically underserved."

Richard Jones, a patient at the William F. Ryan Community Health Center in New York City, credits the center with turning his life around. Jones, who is HIV positive, was transferred from a local hospital clinic to Ryan and spoke about the "professionalism and respect" that he encountered at the health center.

Closing out the morning program was 30 year old Shannon Cathcart who is a patient at the Open Door Family Medical Center in Ossining. "I've been on my own since I was 14. Six months ago I found out I was going to be a mother. I was uninsured but wanted to make sure my baby would come into this world healthy. The folks at Open Door showed me true compassion and concern for my health and my baby's health. Now I can bring a healthy baby in this world. I took time off from work today—I won't be paid—but I wanted to express my gratitude and raise awareness for community health centers."