

Buffalo's Community Health Centers: Healthcare for People With Low Incomes

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What are community health centers?

Community health centers are non-profit, community-oriented healthcare providers. Generally, they are a subset of Federally Qualified Health Centers, institutions that receive special funding because they provide medical care to underserved populations. They offer preventative and primary healthcare, including physical exams, routine testing and screening, immunizations, dental care, pediatrics, women's health, prenatal care, and nutritional services. These clinics are open to all, but designed to reach out to underserved populations, especially low-income individuals, racial and ethnic minorities, recent immigrants, and rural populations. The National Association of Community Health Centers estimates that nationally, their clinics provide health services for over 23 million people, and this number is increasing.¹ To give one example from

Buffalo, the Jericho Road Family Practice serves more than 30,000 people each year.ⁱⁱ

Why should I support community health centers?

Even if you are not a member of one of the targeted populations, and even if you never visit one, community health centers nonetheless provide you with benefits. Multiple studies have shown that the community health center model provides extremely cost-effective health care.ⁱⁱⁱ Research indicates that, as of 2010, community health centers save \$24 billion in health care costs.^{iv} This includes \$6 billion in costs to Medicaid – which is funded by your taxes.^v Since 2010, the benefits of community health centers have only grown greater, as increased funding has allowed the programs to expand.^{vi} In 2009, the public received \$20 billion dollars in total economic benefits, including the generation of 189,158 jobs, as a direct result of a \$2.2 billion investment in community health centers by the federal government.^{vii}



How do community health centers serve low-income individuals?

Poverty is a major concern for community health centers. Nationwide, 72% of people that visit clinics live in poverty.^{viii} In Buffalo, the

Community Health Center calculates that most residents in its targeted area live below 200% of the federal poverty level.^{ix} Furthermore, 21% of patients in the area are completely uninsured.^x Most striking, 57% of patients are on Medicaid.^{xi} To put that in context, a single person must earn less than \$8,818 in a year to qualify for Medicaid.^{xii}

To address this poverty, health centers provide free or low-cost services and flexible payment options. For example, the Neighborhood Health Center provides a sliding fee scale, where low-income individuals pay a reduced rate,^{xiii} and Jericho Road Family Practice promises to provide care regardless of insurance status or ability to pay, and provides flexible payment options.^{xiv} Similarly, the Community Health Center of Buffalo “is committed to providing patient-centered care for all, regardless of the ability to pay.”^{xv}

How do community health centers serve immigrant and refugee populations?

Immigrant, refugee, and other non-English speaking populations are another at-risk group. A Buffalo clinic geared toward immigrant and refugee populations, Jericho Road Family Practice, estimates that, in 2010, only 46% of their patients spoke English as a primary language^{xvi}. After English, the top five languages spoken were Burmese, Somali, Arabic, Spanish and Swahili.^{xvii} Strategies for providing effective care to these populations focus on language barriers and cultural sensitivity.^{xviii}

In the words of the founder of Jericho Road:

Our biggest challenge is providing excellent medical care to such a diverse and underserved population and somehow doing it with limited resources....Many of our [patients] do not know English and their cultures are much different than our own and so it is a big

challenge to communicate effectively....We stand in the gap for an incredibly vulnerable community.^{xix}



How do community health centers serve rural populations?

Poor individuals in rural areas are another group that has trouble getting adequate medical care. Rural populations are statistically more likely to be poor, elderly, have chronic medical conditions and have less access to transportation, than urban populations.^{xx} Migrant farm workers, for example, perform physically demanding work for low wages, and rarely have insurance.^{xxi} Combined with greater distances to travel and relatively fewer medical providers, rural populations are at extreme risk.^{xxii}

Community health centers can help alleviate this problem by emphasizing accessible, affordable care.^{xxiii}

Where can I find a community health center?

There are four organizations that operate community health centers in Buffalo: the Neighborhood Health Center; the Community Health Center of Buffalo, Jericho Road Family Practice; and the Jefferson Family Medicine Center. Except for the Jefferson Family Medicine Center, all of these organizations have multiple locations. Two are located outside of Buffalo – one in Hamburg and one in Niagara Falls. This is notably

different from the national trend, where about half of community health centers are located in rural areas.^{xxiv}

How are community health centers funded?

Community health centers receive most of their funding from public sources, primarily federal grants.^{xxv} In 2009, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act set aside \$2 billion for development of community health centers.^{xxvi} The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (commonly known as “ObamaCare”) established a Community Health Center Fund to provide \$9.5 billion between 2011 and 2015.^{xxvii}

Part of this fund is designed to expand the National Health Service Corps, an organization that encourages medical professionals to work in underserved areas, including community health centers.^{xxviii} The members of the National Health Service Corps provide a two- or four-year work commitment in return for scholarships and loan repayments.^{xxix} Community health centers benefit by saving the cost of hiring medical providers, which allows them to provide affordable healthcare.^{xxx} The Community Health Center Fund also made \$1.5 billion available for construction and restoration.^{xxxi}

Additionally, there are other paths to funding. For example, many patients at community health centers are enrolled in Medicare or Medicaid, and reimbursements from these programs provides a major source of funding.^{xxxii} Foundation grants and individual donations also play a role. Jericho Road Family Practice is supported in part by Jericho Road Ministries, a faith-based organization dedicated to facilitating wellness and self-sufficiency in the lives of refugee and low-income community members in Buffalo.^{xxxiii}



Are there any plans to expand any of the current community health centers, or open new ones?

There is a high demand for low-cost medical services, and health centers are taking advantage of the federal funds provided. Jericho Road Family Practice estimates that they have to turn away between fifty and a hundred people *every week* because they do not have enough providers available.^{xxxiv} As a result, they are seeking to add more doctors, nurse practitioners, and physician assistants.^{xxxv}

In 2010, The Community Health Center of Buffalo opened a satellite office in the city of Niagara Falls – the first federally qualified health center in Niagara Falls.^{xxxvi} In 2011, The Community Health Center completed a significant expansion from an 18,000 square foot facility to the new, 66,000 square foot facility on Benwood Avenue.^{xxxvii}



ⁱ Joanne Haefner & LaVonne Ansari, *Federally qualified health centers play key role*, Buffalo News, December 6, 2011, available at <http://www.buffalonews.com/editorial-page/from-our-readers/another-voice/article661650.ece>; National Association of Community Health Centers, *America's Health Centers*, available at <http://www.nachc.com/client//America%27s%20Health%20Centers%20Fact%20Sheet%20August%202011.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Jericho Road Family Practice, *Message and prayer requests from our founder, Myron Glick, MD*, available at <http://www.jrfg.org/news>. Jericho Road Family Practice is not a Federally Qualified Health Center, meaning that they do not receive the financial benefits associated with that status. They are in the process of applied for “look-alike” status, which entitles them to some financial assistance from the federal government.

ⁱⁱⁱ National Association of Community Health Centers, *America's Health Centers*, available at <http://www.nachc.com/client//America%27s%20Health%20Centers%20Fact%20Sheet%20August%202011.pdf>; press release, *Study Highlights the Cost-Savings of Community Health Centers*, released January 9, 2012, available at <http://www.nachc.com/pressrelease-detail.cfm?pressreleaseID=734>

^{iv} National Association of Community Health Centers, *Cost Effectiveness of Care Provided at Health Centers*, December 2011, available at <http://www.nachc.com/client/documents/Cost%20Effectiveness%20Fact%20Sheet%20Final%2012%20111.pdf>

^v *Id.*

^{vi} Health Reform GPS, *The Community Health Centers and National Health Service Corps Fund*, available at <http://www.healthreformgps.org/resources/the-community-health-centers-and-national-health-service-corps-fund/>

^{vii} *Id.*

^{viii} National Association of Community Health Centers, *America's Health Centers*, available at <http://www.nachc.com/client//America%27s%20Health%20Centers%20Fact%20Sheet%20August%202011.pdf>; press release, *Study Highlights the Cost-Savings of Community Health Centers*, released January 9, 2012, available at <http://www.nachc.com/pressrelease-detail.cfm?pressreleaseID=734>

^{ix} Community Health Center of Buffalo, *About Us: The Community We Serve*, available at http://www.chcb.net/about_us/read.php?id=13; note that the federal poverty level is widely thought to be far lower than what one could consider the “real” poverty level, and measures such as 200% of the federal poverty level are commonly used because they more accurately describe “real” poverty.

^x Community Health Center of Buffalo, *About Us: The Community We Serve*, available at http://www.chcb.net/about_us/read.php?id=13

^{xi} *Id.*

^{xii} New York State Department of Health, *Medicaid in New York State*, available at http://www.health.ny.gov/health_care/medicaid/#qualify

^{xiii} Neighborhood Health Center, *Financing Your Healthcare*, available at <http://www.neighborhoodhealthcenter.org/Financing.html>

^{xiv} Jericho Road Family Practice, *Policies*, available at <http://www.jrfg.org/policies>

^{xv} Community Health Center of Buffalo, *Welcome*, available at <http://www.chcb.net/>

^{xvi} Jericho Road Family Practice, *Message and prayer requests from our founder, Myron Glick, MD*, available at <http://www.jrfg.org/news>

^{xvii} *Id.*

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- ^{xviii} National Association of Community Health Centers, *Health Wanted – the State of Unmet Need for Primary Health Care in America*, March 2012, pp.13-14, available at <http://www.nachc.com/client/documents/health-wanted.html>
- ^{xix} *Id.*
- ^{xx} National Association of Community Health Centers, *Removing Barriers to Care: Community Health Centers in Rural Areas*, November 2011, available at <http://www.nachc.com/client/documents/Rural%20Fact%20Sheet%20-%20November%202011.pdf>
- ^{xxi} National Association of Community Health Centers, *The Role of Health Centers in Caring for Farmworkers*, December 2007, available at http://www.nachc.com/client/documents/Farmworkers_Fact_Sheet_FINAL.pdf
- ^{xxii} National Association of Community Health Centers, *Health Wanted – the State of Unmet Need for Primary Health Care in America*, March 2012, p. 15, available at <http://www.nachc.com/client/documents/health-wanted.html>
- ^{xxiii} *Id.*
- ^{xxiv} National Association of Community Health Centers, *America’s Health Centers*, available at <http://www.nachc.com/client//America%27s%20Health%20Centers%20Fact%20Sheet%20August%202011.pdf>
- ^{xxv} Health Reform GPS, *The Community Health Centers and National Health Service Corps Fund*, available at <http://www.healthreformgps.org/resources/the-community-health-centers-and-national-health-service-corps-fund/>; Joanne Haefner & LaVonne Ansari, *Federally qualified health centers play key role*, Buffalo News, December 6, 2011, available at <http://www.buffalonews.com/editorial-page/from-our-readers/another-voice/article661650.ece>
- ^{xxvi} Health Reform GPS, *The Community Health Centers and National Health Service Corps Fund*, available at <http://www.healthreformgps.org/resources/the-community-health-centers-and-national-health-service-corps-fund/>
- ^{xxvii} *Id.*
- ^{xxviii} National Health Service Corps, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *About the NHSC*, available at <http://nhsc.hrsa.gov/corpsexperience/aboutus/index.html>
- ^{xxix} *Id.*
- ^{xxx} *Id.*
- ^{xxxi} Health Reform GPS, *The Community Health Centers and National Health Service Corps Fund*, available at <http://www.healthreformgps.org/resources/the-community-health-centers-and-national-health-service-corps-fund/>
- ^{xxxii} Joanne Haefner & LaVonne Ansari, *Federally qualified health centers play key role*, Buffalo News, December 6, 2011, available at <http://www.buffalonews.com/editorial-page/from-our-readers/another-voice/article661650.ece>
- ^{xxxiii} Jericho Road Ministries, available at <http://www.jrm-buffalo.org/>
- ^{xxxiv} Jericho Road Family Practice, *Opportunities*, available at <http://www.jrfp.org/opportunities>
- ^{xxxv} *Id.*
- ^{xxxvi} Community Health Center of Buffalo, *About Us: Our Commitment to You*, available at http://www.chcb.net/about_us/read.php?id=4
- ^{xxxvii} Community Health Center of Buffalo, *About Us: History*, available at http://www.chcb.net/about_us/read.php?id=14
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