

## **National Health Center Week**

Each year, the second week of August is dedicated to recognizing the service and contributions of Community Health Centers in providing access to affordable, high quality, cost-effective health care to medically vulnerable and underserved people in the U.S. As part of the week-long observance, dozens of Central Valley health centers will hold events in the communities they serve providing health services, screenings, education, and information healthy active lifestyles and chronic disease prevention. This year's commemoration is especially important in the wake of harsh state budget cuts and as we set our sights on national health care reform.

America's Health Centers serve 18 million people (including 925,000 farmworkers and nearly 940,000 people who are homeless) in 7,000 communities across the U.S. Community Health Centers in the Central Valley care for more than 600,000 people through 2.5 million visits. The Central Valley has over 100 sites that are open to all regardless of their ability to pay.

This year California Community Health Centers experienced the largest cuts in funding in history which will result in decreased services and an increase in families without health insurance. These cuts include decrease of benefits and services to Medi-Cal and the elimination of state funded programs for the uninsured, Farmworkers, and rural health clinics. These cuts particularly harm the Central Valley where there are already 31% fewer primary care physicians than the rest of the state and a lack of specialists. Community Health Centers are responsible for providing a significant proportion of comprehensive primary care services to low-income families and in some areas of the Central Valley, these health centers are the only health care providers available to the community.

For many residents, Community Health Centers provide a medical home by offering a broad range of medical services, and encourage ongoing preventive and routine care. They offer health services to individuals who would otherwise utilize hospital emergency rooms or go without care. Establishing a medical home for patients is key in providing quality health care and reducing the cost to state tax payers.

State funding cuts will make it much more difficult for Community Health Centers to provide access to services. Nevertheless, these setbacks will not diminish the commitment and vital role these health centers have in providing quality health care to Valley residents.

There is little doubt that the conditions affecting the health of Valley residents—including poverty, lack of healthcare access, and poor nutrition—will persist for years to come. These conditions will only serve to exacerbate the already high rates of diabetes and other chronic diseases. Further complicating the matter is the current economic situation and recent cuts to vital health and social service programs. Through it all, health centers will continue to forge ahead—as health centers have for decades—to ensure that quality health care is not jeopardized in their communities.

We invite you to join in this week-long celebration, August 9th - 15th , to focus the health care reform debate on a proven model—Community Health Centers.

David Quackenbush, CEO of the Central Valley Health Network (CVHN), a consortium of 13 federally qualified health centers, serves more than half a million patients yearly.