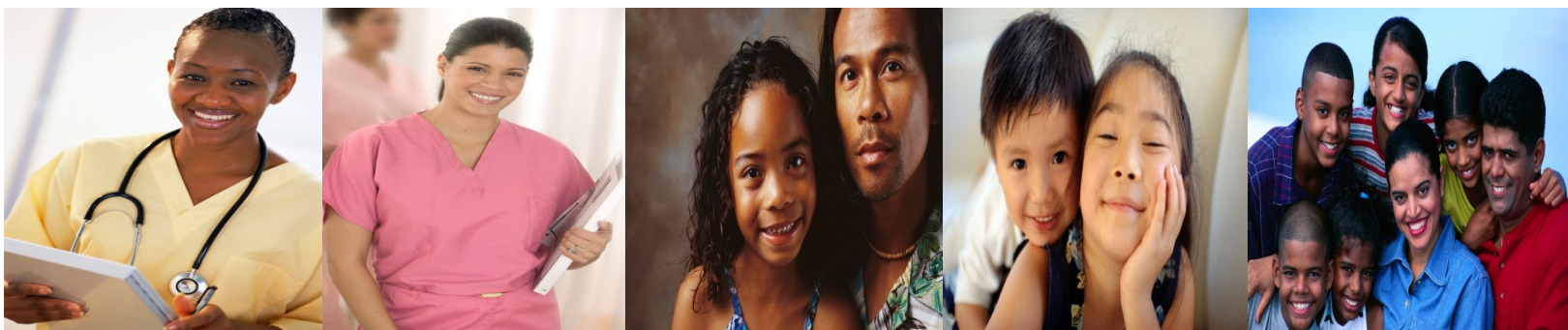


Federal Legislative Agenda 2008



Louisiana Primary Association

**“The Voice of Community-Based Healthcare
for the Medically Underserved”**



Louisiana Primary Care Association Inc.
"Louisiana's Health Centers"



WHAT IS THE LOUISIANA PRIMARY CARE ASSOCIATION?

Established in 1982, the Louisiana Primary Care Association, Inc. (LPCA) is a non-profit corporation whose purpose is to promote accessible, affordable, quality primary health care for the uninsured and medically underserved populations in Louisiana. It is a membership organization of 22 (61 including satellites) Federally Qualified Community Health Centers (FQHCs). LPCA directs its efforts to securing monies that will foster the development of new FQHC sites, and assuring the viability of existing sites through technical support services.

THE STATE OF THE NATION AND LOUISIANA

Every year the cost of healthcare in America continues to rise. Recently, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services projected that health care spending would nearly double by 2017. This means that health care spending would increase to 4.3 trillion dollars or 19.5% of our gross domestic product (GDP). Currently, healthcare spending accounts for about 16.3% of our nation's GDP. According to the Common Wealth Fund Report (Sept. 2007) Louisiana spends a total of \$19.4 billion on healthcare. This accounts for about 10% of the state's 2006 GDP.

Some of the contributing factors of the high health care cost include the need for specialty and inpatient care services, and overly used emergency room care. According to the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences, the U.S. government accounts for 45% of total health care expenditures in this country. These expenditures fund public insurance programs that provide health care subsidies for the poor, disabled, children, and the elderly. Moreover, it is federal law that emergency rooms provide health care regardless of ability to pay. This also contributes to the high cost of healthcare. Louisiana is ranked 3rd in the nation in inappropriate emergency room usage. The American Institute of Preventive Medicine did a study at the Florida Orlando Hospital that found that the average cost of an emergency room visit was \$462 compared to a \$55 charge for a doctor visit. Several other studies have found that the costs of emergency room visits are significantly higher than a primary care doctor visit.

As we forge forward into the year 2009 and beyond, the U.S. Government and Congress are seeking ways to provide coverage to an estimated 47 million uninsured Americans that are increasingly likely to receive health care in our nation's emergency rooms. Louisiana has the burden of providing health services to 717,309 uninsured residents, which accounts for 16.9% of the state's population.

What is the solution? There is no one answer for fixing America's healthcare system, however, community health centers have proven to be a sound, and cost efficient way to provide health care to the uninsured while lowering health care spending. Last year alone, community health centers saved the healthcare system up to \$18 billion dollars. Community health center patients save Medicaid an average of 30 to 34% in spending. Another independent study found that the cost of community health centers is 41% lower than that of other providers. Health centers have also been cited by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to improve health outcomes. The National Association of Community Health Center has developed the Access for All initiative. This initiative seeks to increase the number of health centers incrementally until 2015; thus resulting in affordable access to health services for an additional 30 million Americans. The projected cost savings annually will be 40 billion dollars by 2015.

**Policy Request: Ensure the Vitality of the Health Center Program**

Reauthorize the Health Center Program (S. 901/H.R. 1343)

- Health centers urge congress to vote support the reauthorization of the health center program. The reauthorization of the health center program guarantees the existence of the program as established by Section 330 of the Public Health Services Act. It also legitimizes, and protects all rights granted to the program by law. Louisiana currently has 22 organizations and 61 sites with satellites that benefit from this law. The law sets a standard of care, and guarantees provision of those standards by law. *Failure to reauthorize the program may result in the unwarranted change in a model of care, otherwise protected by law that has a proven success in comprehensiveness and cost savings.*

Policy Request: Ensure the Vitality of the Health Center Program

Increase Health Center Program Funding

- Health centers urge congress to increase health center by \$248 million in FY2009. The increase in health center funding will help to establish additional health centers in medically underserved areas throughout the nation. According to the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals, in 2007, 63 of Louisiana's 64 parishes were designated as full or partial health professional shortage areas. Last year health centers only received a \$77 million dollar increase in funding. *While the health center program fared better than other programs the reduced level of funding will greatly decrease the chances of new access point (NAP) and expanded medical capacity (EMC) grants being awarded to Louisiana. HRSA recently announced that out of 220 EMC grants only 20 will be funded and out of 270 NAP grants on 40 will be funded.*
- House members are urged to show their support by signing the Pallone/Deal Letter.
- Senate members are urged to show their support by signing the Stabenow/Bond Letter.

Policy Request: Ensure a Strong Health Center Workforce

Reauthorize National Health Services Corps (S 941 and H.R. 4205)

- Health centers urge Congress to reauthorize the National Health Services Corps (NHSC) program. This program provides incentives such as loan repayment and scholarships to providers working in health professional shortage areas. Nationally, the NHSC program has more than 4,000 participating clinicians. Half of these clinicians are working in health centers. *In Louisiana, several medically underserved rural communities benefit from the placement of NHSC providers. If the NHSC program is not reauthorized Louisiana's most vulnerable populations may suffer a substantial loss in its already fragile provider base.*



Policy Request: Ensure a Strong Health Center Workforce

Increase National Health Services Corps (NHSC) Funding

- Health centers urge congress to increase NHSC funding to \$150 million in FY2009. This increased appropriation will provide for the placement 800 NHSC clinicians in high-need communities. *Louisiana will directly benefit from the additional federal resources for the placement of providers in high need areas.*

Revitalize the Health Professions Programs

- Health centers urge congress to revitalize Health Professions Programs. These programs provide for unique training, recruitment and retention programs for health centers, and other programs included in Titles VII and VII of the Public Health Services Act. *Louisiana's Health Centers will lose vital training, recruitment and retention programs without the support of Congress. Some of the trainings include pre-doctoral training in primary care, physician assistant training in primary care and faculty development training in primary care.*

Increase Health Profession Programs Funding

- Health centers urge congress to increase the funding for Health Professions Programs to \$550 million. This includes \$30 million for Area Health Education Centers (AHECs). *Louisiana's Health Centers would greatly benefit from the additional resources for training, recruitment and retention. Louisiana currently has four AHECs that also assist with provider recruitment.*

Policy Request: Modernize and Improve Health Center Reimbursements

Update Medicare FQHC Payment System (H.R. 2897 and S. 2188)

- Health centers urge congress to improve Medicare payment mechanism and to update FQHC Medicare benefit package to include all Medicare covered ambulatory care services. Nationally, $\frac{3}{4}$ of all health centers lose money when serving Medicare beneficiaries. This amounts to about 50 million a year. *According to the 2006 Uniform Data System Report, 11,222 or 8.7% of Louisiana Health Center users receive services through Medicare.*

Restructure Health Center State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) Payments

- Health centers urge congress to pass legislation that would restructure SCHIP payments. Nationally, health centers provide health services for 1 out of every 9 SCHIP enrollees. *Help Louisiana's Health Centers by providing for adequate SCHIP reimbursement as contained in the House and Senate passed SCHIP reauthorization bills.*

Broaden Access to Care for Farm workers

- Health centers urge congress to implement HHS Farm worker report recommendations to assist farmers in overcoming barriers in accessing Medicaid and SCHIP programs. Some of the barriers included language barriers, the frequent moving and the inability to enroll from state to state, and Medicaid does not provide services for non-disabled low-income adults without dependent children. *Louisiana's health centers stand to lose substantial resources providing health services to uninsured Migrant and Seasonal farm workers.*



Policy Request: Expand Health Center Facilities

Ensure that Health Centers have access to low cost capital (S.2270)

- Health centers urge congress to support S. 2270. This bipartisan piece of legislation will allow health centers to reduce capital project cost through participation in the HUD Mortgage Insurance Program. In addition, access to tax credits will make financing capital projects for health centers economical. *Louisiana's health centers urge congress to support this initiative. Last year, Louisiana's health centers partnered with the state in leveraging new market tax credits with a state appropriation and loan monies.*

Support Health Center Renovation Needs (S. 1990)

- Health centers urge congress to support S. 1990 which allows health center grants funds to cover health center renovation, construction and expansion needs. *Louisiana's Health Centers will greatly benefit by having the flexibility to use a portion of health center grant funds for renovations. This will ultimately aid in improving environment in which medically underserved patients are served.*

Expand Access to Health Information Technologies (HIT)

- Health centers urge congress to provide financial support and incentives to encourage the acquisition of HIT. Louisiana's Health Centers and other safety net providers suffered because of the lack of HIT during the tragedies of hurricanes Katrina and Rita. *Evacuees came to health centers for healthcare with no medical record. Several providers that had paper records lost their records. Since those tragedies, the state has recognized the value in HIT and is seeking ways to support the spreading and acquisition of HIT. HIT capabilities will greatly enhance a provider's ability to provide high-quality health care services.*

Policy Request: Health Insurance Coverage and Quality Care for All

Expand Health Coverage Opportunities

- Health centers urge congress to expand health coverage opportunities. In addition, seek affordable insurance coverage options for all Americans. *Currently, there are 47 million uninsured residents. Louisiana has 717,309 uninsured residents. The cost of health care will continue to rise unless the uninsured is insured coupled with the promotion of preventive health care.*

Make the Medical Home Model a Priority for Every American

- Health centers urge congress to make the medical home model a priority every American. Research has shown that community-based health care improves health outcomes. *Moreover, access to such services will aid in thwarting emergency room visits. Again, Louisiana is ranked 3rd in the nation in un-warranted usage of the emergency room. Congressional support of the medical home model will great decrease the cost of health care services.*

**Policy Request: Health Insurance Coverage and Quality Care for All**

Stabilize Health Insurance Cost for Health Center Employees

- Health centers urge congress to assist health centers reduce their own health insurance costs, health centers ask Congress to pass legislation to allow health centers to participate in the Federal Employee Health Benefits Program (FEHBP). *Louisiana's health centers employee insurance will be greatly reduced if congress supports their participation in the FEHBP. The additional revenues can be used for other health center services including care for the uninsured.*