

North Country HealthCare Is Your Community Health Center

By Ann Roggenbuck, CEO

For over four decades, America's Community Health Centers have been providing basic healthcare for those in need. Today, Community Health Centers serve the primary health care needs of more than 20 million patients in over 8,000 locations across the United States. Health centers play a crucial role during tough economic times, providing affordable health services for millions of uninsured and newly jobless Americans. The number of uninsured patients getting care at health centers grew 62 percent since 2000, the most significant growth in the program's history. One of the fastest growing segments of health center patients are people in the age range of 45 to 64, who are living in poverty and are chronically ill. Health centers now serve 1 in 7 uninsured people nationally, including 1 in 5 of the low income uninsured. Demand is at an all time high, and health centers are responding by expanding their reach and building the workforce and facilities to answer the need.

Health centers provide a unique and comprehensive approach to health care that saves money, improves patient health and creates good local jobs in the communities they serve. Community Health Centers save money every time an uninsured patient opts for an exam and treatment at the first sign of a health issue instead of waiting until a costly Emergency Room visit is the only option. Health centers also save money for Americans looking for work whose families could otherwise face poor health without care, or piles of medical debt. Patients who receive the majority of their ambulatory care at community health centers have 24% lower annual overall medical expenditures than those who do not.

Affordable and accessible health care transforms communities by narrowing health disparities, eliminating low birth weights, reducing chronic disease and unnecessary hospitalizations. Through use of a sliding fee scale all eligible patients receive a significant discount for healthcare provided in community health centers. A local approach to health care, combined with an innovative emphasis on comprehensive preventative care, generates \$24 billion in annual savings to the health care system – to taxpayers and private payers alike.

Experts predict that the numbers of uninsured in America could reach as high as 60 million with one of every five Americans uninsured by the end of the decade. In addition, health disparities are widening for Hispanic Americans, American Indians, Asian Americans, African Americans, and other racial and ethnic minorities. Health centers have launched a plan called *ACCESS for All America* to nearly double their current capacity – to serve 40 million people – by the year 2015. Expanding access in community health centers will yield healthier families and healthier communities.

North Country HealthCare is your community health center and offers primary care, dental services, behavioral health and pharmacy services all under one roof. They operate 15 clinics throughout northern Arizona providing approximately 170,000 patient visits this year. North Country HealthCare serves as the medical home for 40,000 people throughout northern Arizona, 20,000 who reside in Flagstaff and the surrounding area. They are one of the largest employers in northern Arizona, pay above average wages and serve as an important economic engine in the communities they serve. North Country HealthCare accepts Medicare, AHCCCS, commercial insurance and offers a sliding fee scale based on income and family size. Because North Country HealthCare treats patients regardless of their ability to pay, the more insured individuals that are seen, the more uninsured North Country HealthCare can care for. If you are in need of a medical home, North Country has a large and diverse provider team and is always accepting new patients. Let us be “your primary care provider of choice!”

Ann Roggenbuck is CEO of North Country HealthCare.