

## In Iowa's Interest: Powering Healthier Communities

Written by Sen. Tom Harkin  
Monday, 06 August 2012 08:48

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By Senator Tom Harkin

Beginning August 5th, communities across the country and in Iowa will celebrate National Health Center Week. This week is meant to raise awareness of the crucial role that Community Health Centers – or CHCs – play in providing health care to millions of Americans. These clinics serve everyone, regardless of ability to pay, and have become a lifeline to Iowans who may have lost a job or are suffering in this economic downturn.

This year's theme is: "Celebrating America's Health Centers: Powering Healthier Communities," which is intended to showcase the multitude of ways these health centers are strengthening communities.

And helping local communities is exactly what these centers do. CHCs serve some of the nation's most vulnerable – individuals who even if insured would nonetheless remain isolated from traditional forms of medical care because of where they live, who they are, the language they speak, and their higher levels of complex health care needs.

Last year alone, more than 170,000 Iowans chose CHCs for their healthcare, accessing medical, dental, and behavioral health services. Today, Iowa's health centers provide care to nearly 123,000 Iowans living in poverty, which is more than one-third of the state's total population living in poverty.

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Similarly, individuals and families in Iowa who do not have health insurance have also continued to grow, with many of them seeking care at CHCs. In 2010, Iowa's health centers served more than 66,000 uninsured patients, which is one-quarter of the state's total uninsured population. Taken together, uninsured, Medicaid, and Medicare patients make up more than three-quarters of CHC patients in Iowa.

As chair of the Senate's health committee and the Appropriations subcommittee that funds health care initiatives, I have made the expansion of the Community Health Center network a major priority. I have worked to secure a \$300 million increase in funding for CHCs this year and also to ensure provisions are included in the new health reform law, the Affordable Care Act, aimed at strengthening CHCs. These efforts will increase the nurse practitioner, hygienist, and health care workforce and has already funded 286 new sites. In Iowa alone, the construction and renovation funding I worked to include in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and the Affordable Care Act have brought nearly \$30 million of investment to communities across Iowa since 2009.

We are already seeing the benefits of federal CHC policy in Iowa.

In June, the Sioux Community Health Center received a designation as a federal health center, which means the Center will begin to receive an annual operating grant of \$595,833 from the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services.

This week, a clinic will expand on the east side of Des Moines, having been constructed with a \$2.6 million grant from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

Council Bluffs recently opened a new facility with \$5 million from the Affordable Care Act, and my office continues to work with the town of Clinton to find a good site to construct a clinic there with \$9 million, also from the Affordable Care Act.

Across our state, community health centers are improving care, even as they strive to serve more people. With help from the Recovery Act, they are transitioning to electronic health records that will better coordinate care, even while they work with the State of Iowa to welcome

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IowaCares patients into their clinics.

I am very proud of Iowa's health centers and I encourage all Iowans to find out what our health centers are doing in your area. To find the nearest center, please visit: [www.ianepca.com](http://www.ianepca.com). For more information about National Health Center Week, visit <http://www.healthcenterweek.org/join.html>

. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact any of my offices in Iowa or Washington, D.C. or visit my website at [harkin.senate.gov](http://harkin.senate.gov)

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