

Community Health Centers Serve Critical Role in Health Care Access for the Uninsured

*Interview with Beth Giesting, Executive Director,
Hawai'i Primary Care Association*



What are community health centers?

Community health centers (CHCs) are community-based nonprofit organizations that provide primary health care to people who otherwise might not get it – for example, people without private health insurance, those with language or cultural barriers, residents of remote places, and others. In Hawai'i, 96% of health center patients are below 200% of poverty, 31% are Native Hawaiian, 21% need language interpreters, and 70% live in rural communities.

How are CHCs part of the solution for Hawaii's uninsured?

First, health centers are available to anyone, regardless of insurance status. More than a third of CHC patients in Hawai'i are uninsured. Because of the widespread availability of CHCs, uninsured people can get health care they need before they get so sick they need emergency or in-patient care.

Second, community health centers provide services that can prevent more serious health conditions that result in higher costs for treatment, as well as effectively manage chronic diseases such as diabetes and asthma. Research shows that health centers provide quality care and do an excellent job of providing preventive services like immunizations, chole-

40th Anniversary

2005 marks the 40th anniversary of the nationwide community health center movement. Significantly, health centers started around the same time that other publicly-funded strategies for health care access were being forged, most notably Medicare for people who are elderly, and Medicaid for low-income families and people with disabilities. Today, federal and state governments are pondering the growing enrollments and costs for Medicare and Medicaid programs. At the same time, a recent study done by the University of California at San Diego says that more than 1 in 4 workers - 56 million people - will be uninsured by 2013 due to the escalating cost of private insurance. Finally, our fragmented system of health care financing and delivery has clearly resulted in "health disparities" – unequal treatment, less access to care, and poorer health outcomes – for racial minorities and low income people. These are big problems. Fortunately, community health centers are a big part of the solution.

screening, pap smears, mammograms, and health education and counseling. Also, because CHC patients are often very sick and have little income, health centers are experts in managing care, cobbling together resources, and getting great cost-effective results.

Third, health centers overcome health disparities: regardless of race, income, and insurance status, health center patients receive the same high level of care and attention. Because

Continued on page 3

CHC Network Grows to Include West Hawai'i and Ko'olauloa

In Hawai'i, we are fortunate to have thirteen community health centers on five islands serving 80,000 people every year:

Hawai'i

Bay Clinic

(serving Hilo, Ka'u, Kea'au, Pāhoā)

Hāmākua Health Center

(serving the Hāmākua district)

West Hawai'i Community Health Center

(serving Kailua-Kona)

Kaua'i

Kaua'i Community Health Center

(serving Waimea and Kapā'a)

O'ahu

Kalihi-Pālama Health Center

(serving urban Honolulu)

Kōkua Kalihi Valley

(serving Kalihi Valley)

Ko'olauloa Community Health & Wellness Center

(serving Kahuku)

Wai'anae Coast Comprehensive Health Center

(serving Wai'anae, Kapolei, Waipahu)

Waikīkī Health Center

(serving urban Honolulu)

Waimānalo Health Center

(serving rural windward O'ahu)

Moloka'i

Moloka'i Community Health Center

(serving the island of Moloka'i)

Maui

Community Clinic of Maui

(serving Kahului, Wailuku, Lāhainā)

Hāna Community Health Center

(serving the Hāna area)

Legislative Update

Hawai'i Uninsured Project Suggested to Facilitate Proposed Health Care Task Force

One of the major health initiatives to emerge during the recently adjourned legislative session was HB 1304, CD1, which establishes a temporary health care task force to develop a plan for implementing health care for all Hawai'i residents. The Legislature recognized that the number of uninsured or underinsured individuals in Hawai'i is not declining and it is increasingly difficult to obtain and afford health care coverage. This bill provides an opportunity for community stakeholders with diverse interests to investigate options that will provide health care access and coverage to the nearly ten percent of Hawai'i residents who are currently uninsured.

Key features of the bill:

The task force will use the work of the Hawai'i Uninsured Project, the Vision 2000 Healthcare Congress, and the Governor's Blue Ribbon Panel on Cancer Care in Hawaii, among others, as a starting point for developing a plan. The thirteen members of the task force will be appointed by the Governor from recommendations submitted by the Senate President, Speaker of the House, and the Insurance Commissioner.

Members of the task force shall include representatives from the health care industry, private sector organizations, individuals who actively participate in the Hawai'i Uninsured Project, public employee unions, and the neighbor islands. The Hawai'i Uninsured Project will serve as the facilitator to convene meetings, provide minutes and staff support, and facilitate the contracting of expert testimony and studies.

The bill is currently being reviewed by the Governor's office. To view the full text of the legislation, visit the Hawaii State Legislature's website at www.capitol.hawaii.gov.

Continued from page 1.

CHCs disproportionately provide care for and improve the health of impoverished, uninsured minorities, the centers diminish these disparities across the whole population.

Fourth, CHCs offer a comprehensive array of primary health care for all ages in one convenient place. Typically, services include medical, behavioral health, dental, health education, access to prescription drugs, and more because their clients are not likely to get the care they need anywhere else.

And fifth, CHCs provide support services to help their patients get the care they need, like transportation and translation assistance. In addition, CHC staff helps people enroll in a variety of other benefit programs they might be eligible for – medical insurance for children, WIC nutrition assistance, food stamps – all without charge. Counseling in nutrition, smoking cessation, and fitness contribute to healthy lifestyle choices. These positive changes influence better health while engaging people to take an active role in their own well-being.

What are the limits to the role CHCs can play?

While health centers save the health care system money overall, the costs of providing quality primary and preventive health care to people who are poor and in ill health are substantial and continually growing. The network of community health centers in Hawai'i is not adequately funded to meet current and expanding needs for health care. A national initiative to increase health center funding and double the number of people served between 2000 and 2005 has effectively enlarged the number of health centers, but it isn't enough. Maintaining the fragile balance of health center financing requires federal grants, state funding, support from health plans, private contributions, and – of equal importance – reliable Medicaid policy.

» e-updates «

HUP's Electronic Updates on the Uninsured

In early 2005, the Hawai'i Uninsured Project initiated an email distribution that informed recipients about current trends and information related to expanding health care coverage for the uninsured. The email includes highlights on national trends – recent Congressional action, federal program updates, and results of national studies and other findings – as well as state-based and regional initiatives and policy proposals to tackle this continuing problem.

If you would like to receive Updates on the Uninsured, please send an email to ctaniguchi@hipaonline.com and type **SUBSCRIBE E-UPDATES** in the subject line.

An additional limitation is the scope of services a health center can offer. The wide array of primary care services provided by CHCs goes a long way in meeting the health needs of the underserved. However, health centers generally are not able to provide emergency services, specialty diagnosis and treatment, or in-patient care. These constraints are not well-known; many people assume that all Hawai'i residents eventually get the health care they need. This, tragically, is not the case. Shifting that burden to hospital emergency rooms is astronomical. Neglecting those services could be catastrophic.

To sum up, community health centers provide an effective mix of primary care services to people least likely to get health care in our society. Their services help patients live healthier lives and reduce costs to the overall health care system. Nevertheless, lack of adequate funding limits the response of health centers to growing community needs. Attention must also be given to emergency, specialty, and in-patient services to ensure vital access to all necessary health care benefits for all Hawai'i residents.



Milestones

TO COVERAGE

More Options. Better Access. Hawaii needs it now.

Downtown Community Health Fair Highlights “Cover the Uninsured Week” in Hawai‘i

Joining programs across the country, the Hawai‘i Uninsured Project sponsored a free community health fair on Tuesday, May 3rd at Tamarind Park in downtown Honolulu to bring attention to the more than 45 million Americans without health care coverage. Now in its third year, “Cover the Uninsured Week” is funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and is the largest public health initiative on the issue of the uninsured. Currently in Hawai‘i, about 113,000 people, or nearly 10 percent of the population, are without health insurance. Research from the University of Hawai‘i indicates that about 75 percent of the state’s uninsured are adults, of which 58 percent are working. About 23 percent are children.

Government agencies and community organizations provided free health screenings, risk assessments, consultation and information on living a healthy lifestyle, preventive care, and access to health care. A big mahalo to the following participating organizations who donated their time and expertise:

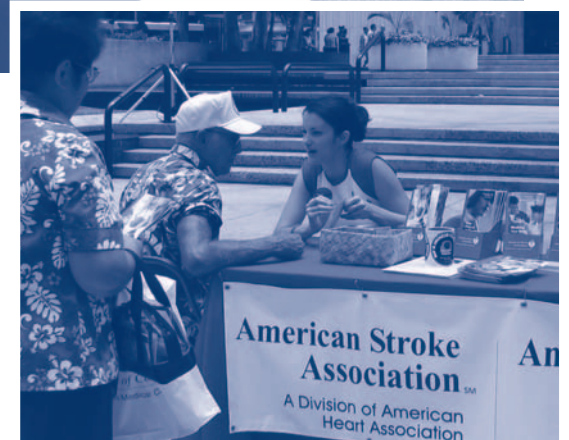
AARP Hawai‘i Chapter
Aloha United Way
Alzheimer’s Association
American Cancer Society
American Diabetes Association Hawai‘i
American Heart Association
Department of Commerce & Consumer Affairs
Insurance Division
Department of Health
Healthy Hawai‘i Initiative

Department of Human Services
Med-QUEST Division & Hawaii Rx Plus Program
Department of Labor & Industrial Relations
Executive Office on Aging
Sage PLUS Program
Hawai‘i Covering Kids
Hawai‘i Primary Care Association
Hawai‘i Uninsured Project
Ke Ola Mamo
Papa Ola Lokahi

Mr. Henry Oliva, Deputy Director of the Department of Human Services, read a proclamation from Governor Linda Lingle, which proclaimed May 1-8, 2005 as “Cover the Uninsured Week in Hawaii.” The Hawaii Pacific University Cheerleaders, 2005 winners of three national titles at the National Cheerleaders Association Collegiate Championship, entertained the lunch crowd with cheers and stunts.



DHS Deputy Director Henry Oliva presented Hawaii Institute for Public Affairs President & CEO Bill Kaneko and HUP Executive Director Laurel Johnston with a proclamation from Governor Linda Lingle proclaiming “May 1-8 as Cover the Uninsured Week in Hawaii.”



Lysandra Sayer of the American Heart Association conducted free blood pressure screenings and provided information about heart disease and stroke at the community health fair.

Meeting the State's Long Term Care Needs

Caregiver Training and Apprentice Program

According to the Department of Health, Hawaii's life expectancy rate of 75.9 for men and 82.0 for women is the highest in the nation and our senior population is growing at more than twice the national average. In an effort to meet the state's increasing need for long term care services, the Department, under the leadership of Director Chiyome Fukino M.D., is currently developing a caregiver training and apprenticeship program to assure skilled and knowledgeable direct caregivers to provide quality care, while striving to increase the workforce.

Certified nursing assistants (CNAs) work under the supervision of a nurse and provide assistance to patients with daily living tasks. In order to increase the number of trained CNAs, the Department has created a U.S. Department of Labor Certified Apprentice Program. Since June 2004, the Department has been working with the University of Hawai'i community college system to develop a universal curriculum for CNAs.

The first ten students began training on Molokai earlier this year. Upon completion of the 150 hour curriculum, these students will be able to take the American Red Cross Certification exam to become a CNA. Once certified, they will be placed at an apprenticeship worksite for 2000 hours or one year with pay. This apprenticeship program will provide on-the-job training, skills development, and perhaps the opportunity for permanent employment at the facility. During the apprenticeship period, CNAs will have the flexibility to enhance their education, develop advanced skills, and advance to License Practical Nurses and Registered Nurses.

Grant money from the Rural Health Development Program provided for a coordinator to complete the curriculum and materials development, convene workgroup meetings, interview students, and develop and maintain a tracking system.

Plans are in the works to expand the program to all islands. For more information, please contact the Department of Health at 586-4080.

What's Up *with* HUP?

*News from the
Hawai'i Uninsured Project*

In conjunction with Cover the Uninsured Week, HUP Executive Director **Laurel Johnston** and Leadership Group members **Paul Tom** and **Rich Meiers** discussed Hawaii's uninsured on Mike Buck's "Community Matters" radio program, which was broadcast on Clear Channel Communications' seven AM/FM stations in Hawai'i on Sunday, May 1, 2005.

At its May 5th meeting, the HUP Leadership Group authorized the formation of a work group to address issues and develop a policy brief related to the Native Hawaiian uninsured population. Preliminary research indicates that there is a disproportionate number of uninsured Native Hawaiians both in Hawai'i and on the mainland.

On May 17, 2005, **Laurel Johnston** made a presentation to the Administrative Committee of the

Continued on back page.

Continued from page 5.

Hawai'i Employer-Union Health Benefits Trust Fund (EUTF) Board. Laurel outlined one of HUP's policy proposals to allow sole proprietors and part-time employees (who are currently exempt from Hawaii's Prepaid Health Care Act) to purchase insurance through the EUTF, in hopes of making coverage more affordable and expanding the pool of working insured.

Planning has begun for a 2005 Health Policy Forum in October! Stay tuned for more details in the coming weeks.

MISSION

To ensure health coverage access to all who need it.

Working in partnership with researchers and the community, the project is an educational resource to support policy-makers as they develop workable plans that will cover the uninsured. The project also aims to raise awareness and improve understanding of the problem's magnitude and the consequences of a large uninsured population.

The Hawai'i Uninsured Project is a program of the Hawaii Institute of Public Affairs, an independent, nonpartisan and nonprofit organization dedicated to elevating Hawaii's public decision-making process through sound public policy analysis, fact-based research and community .

This newsletter is supported in part by funding from The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, awarded to the State of Hawaii Department of Health.

The issues of health coverage access can only be solved by a coordinated effort of all segments of our community. Our ohana represents a strong, broad and growing alliance.

THE LEADERSHIP GROUP

Hawai'i State Department of Health Project Leader

Aloha United Way
Benefit Plan Consultants
Chamber of Commerce of Hawaii
Hawai'i Community Foundation
Hawai'i Covering Kids
Hawaii Employers Council
Hawaii Health Information Corporation
Hawaii Hotel & Lodging Association
Hawaii Pacific Health
HMSA
Hawai'i Primary Care Association
Hawai'i State Department of Human Services
Hawai'i State Department of Labor & Industrial Relations
Healthcare Association of Hawaii
Ho'ola Lahui Hawai'i
ILWU
Kaiser Permanente
Moloka'i General Hospital
National Federation of Independent Business
Papa Ola Lokahi
University of Hawai'i

Milestones
TO COVERAGE



The Hawai'i Uninsured Project
Hawaii Institute for Public Affairs
1001 Bishop Street
American Savings Bank Tower - Suite 1132
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Tel: 808.585.7931
Fax: 808.585.7932

Prst Std
U.S. Postage
PAID
Honolulu, HI
Permit No. 59