

World Count: 456

**CONGRESS SHOULD FUND COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTERS**

Recent polls show that Americans view health care as a top priority. Yet a recent study showed that although the U.S. possesses one of the most sophisticated and expensive health care systems in the world, many states are losing ground on key measures related to life expectancy.

[USE THIS SPACE TO DESCRIBE THE HEALTH CARE ACCESS CHALLENGES IN YOUR STATE]

When patients delay getting care, they wind up in need of far more expensive care when their condition worsens.

Access to affordable, primary health care is vital to wellness but, unfortunately, in rural states like [INSERT YOUR STATE HERE], long-distance travel or transportation to a doctor’s office can pose a challenge. Too often, health conditions that could have been prevented are left unaddressed. This is becoming more commonplace: Some 250 rural counties across the nation are without any providers. Sixty-two million people (including many with employer-sponsored health insurance) live in these areas that have few or no options for primary care.

Community Health Centers formed more than 50 years ago because of the growing recognition that putting doctors in poor communities was a powerful weapon against poverty and ill-health. Today, they provide primary care to more than 28 million people nationwide. Nearly half of health centers are located in rural communities.

Among the environmental factors at the root cause of illness, including clean water, jobs, nutrition and safe housing, access to primary care is a pivotal driver that determines how long one will live. U.S. counties with a sufficient supply of primary care providers have lower mortality rates, according to a recent study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association-Internal Medicine*. Indeed, the same study noted that each 10 additional primary care physicians per 100,000 people was linked to a 51.5-day increase in life expectancy.

The work that health centers do to extend and improve lives generates cost savings across the health care system, but the return on investment depends on long-term support. Congress needs to commit secure and sustained health center funding for the people and communities they represent. We are deeply appreciative of the work of our leaders in Congress who support long-term sustained funding for health centers. The work of health centers to ensure access to preventive health care and bridge the life expectancy gap must continue.

Several bipartisan bills have been introduced in Congress that will provide long-term and stable funding for health centers, as well as for programs that help build the primary care workforce we need for the future. I am hopeful my leaders in Congress [NAME YOUR REPRESENTATIVES] will do the right thing and join in the effort to pass legislation. The health of our community depends on it.