



Listen up, Washington: Don't lose sight of community health centers

By John Sawyer, M.D. | January 5, 2017

When it comes to healthcare policy, this is a time of both turmoil and opportunity. It's also a time for the stakeholders to speak. As Washington mulls the status of the Affordable Care Act and priorities for the future, athenaInsight asked physicians and healthcare executives to share their advice.

Change is in the air. When I visited Capitol Hill with a group of physicians just after the November election, we could sense it in the hallways and offices. Our country will once again change the way we pay for – and therefore, deliver – healthcare. The repeal of the ACA is a given.

As that repeal and replace project takes place, it is crucial to remember the roles that our nation's community health centers play. There are over 1,200 community health centers in the United States. They serve more than 22 million individuals, 71 percent of whom live below the poverty line, 28 percent of whom are uninsured, and 47 percent of whom are on Medicaid.

Half of these health centers are located in rural areas. In many locations, they truly represent the safety net providers.

Health centers depend on Section 330 grant funding from the Public Health Service Act. Their very survival and ability to carry out their mission depends on maintaining that funding stream. And if repeal of the ACA means the number of uninsured patients will rise, then the need for grant funding will only increase.

It is worth noting that community health center funding rose during the last Republican administration. As we enter this time of uncertainty, we must ensure that Section 330 funding remains intact. Those citizens most in need depend on it. For them, it is literally life and death.

John Sawyer, M.D., is an internal medicine physician at Hudson Headwaters Health Network, a federally qualified health center in upstate New York.



A daily news hub reporting from the heart of the health care internet, with access to a comprehensive data set of health care transactions from athenahealth's nationwide network. We equip leaders with actionable insight and inspiration for making health care work as it should.

Stay in the know

Sign up for weekly data and news:
insight.athenahealth.com/newsletter