



THE DAYTONA BEACH NEWS-JOURNAL

Community health centers play a crucial role

Saturday

Posted Mar 28, 2015 at 9:47 PM Updated Mar 28, 2015 at 11:42 PM

I began working in health care more than a decade ago and became familiar with the amazing work of federally qualified health centers, or community health centers. Ever since, I have devoted my business life to assuring that these critically important centers are on sound fiscal ground, so that they can continue to deliver care to everyone who seeks it from them. Their mission has become my mission, and it is shared by our employees, as well.

But funding for community health centers is in jeopardy. If Congress does not act, a major source of critical funding will expire after this year. This cut could be as high as 70 percent. That would be a disaster for the fragile health care system of our entire nation.

Federally qualified health centers are located in communities all around the country. They are nonprofit, consumer-directed health care organizations that serve medically underserved people and communities.

They provide comprehensive primary health, dental and behavioral care to all people, regardless of their ability to pay. FQHCs focus on wellness and prevention.

I was surprised to learn from the National Association of Community Health Centers that 62 million Americans lack access to primary care, and that most of those people actually have health insurance. They just don't have many options for how or where they receive their care.

By making primary care accessible and affordable, community health centers keep patients healthier and reduce emergency room use. In fact, they have been recognized for their efficiency and effectiveness by the Federal Office of Management and Budget as the No. 1 most cost-effective health and human services program of all time!

In Florida, the 2012 statewide average cost was \$545 per person for a year of comprehensive primary care, including dental and behavioral health services, according to the Florida Association of Community Health Centers. I defy any provider to match that number.

Florida currently has 51 federally qualified health centers with 330 locations in 58 of Florida's 67 counties, including locations in DeLand, Deltona and Pierson. They provide care for more than 1.1 million patients with over 4.2 million patient visits in 2012.

Moreover, they provide employment for 9,410 Florida residents, usually right in the communities where they live. In addition to being vital health resources, they are important economic engines in those communities, contributing \$1.2 billion annually to the Florida economy, according to the Florida Association of Community Health Centers. Few organizations can claim such a profound mix of both social and economic benefits.

Some members of Congress from both parties are calling for action to save our community health centers, and I applaud them for recognizing that their constituents would suffer if they lose the centers.

I urge all public officials and residents of Volusia and Flagler counties to contact their federal representatives to ask them

to vote to continue funding for federally qualified health centers.
They are a vital resource to our nation and to our own community. We must raise our voices to support them.

Meyer is the founder and CEO of Synergy Billing in Daytona Beach. Synergy Billing provides revenue cycle management, credentialing services, training and education to federally qualified health centers. He can be reached at mjaysonmeyer@synergybilling.com.