

Background

The Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers and ten health centers have partnered with the Massachusetts' Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) in a Medical Home demonstration project to model primary care practice changes for the state's primary care providers. The partnership represents one of five sites selected and underwritten by the Commonwealth Fund, a national foundation focused on improving health system performance. Patient-centered medical homes provide benefits to both patients and caregivers. Patients gain more one-on-one time with their physicians and care teams, and become better engaged in their long-term health goals and treatment decisions. At the same time, the model promotes increased coordination of care within the health care system, cooperation among primary care teams and increased utilization of preventive care.

Impact

Participating health centers already are demonstrating improved access for patients through timely appointments for routine and episodic care. In addition, providers and care teams are able to proactively plan care with patients who are identified as having chronic illnesses or other challenging health issues. These efforts in combination with ongoing health technology infrastructure development at health centers will have a major impact on patient health outcomes and costs by reducing ER visits, unnecessary hospitalizations and overall utilization of specialized, expensive health care.

Issue

The Medical Home Initiative is being developed in parallel with state payment reform proposals that will help determine how providers will be reimbursed based on patient-centered models of care. It is important to remember that community health centers care for disproportionate numbers of lower income and ethnically and culturally diverse patients with chronic and complex medical and social needs. As a result, their patients rely on a comprehensive team of primary care practitioners that includes language interpreters, social workers and nurse educators — just to name a few. In addition, health centers have limited access to capital markets, impacting their ability to finance health information technology projects that are critical to monitoring quality and costs.

Solution

Payment reform models must take into consideration the cultural and socioeconomic-based needs of patients served by health centers as well as their limited access to capital financing for technology.

Background

Community health centers have been front and center in Massachusetts health reform efforts, providing comprehensive primary care to thousands of previously uninsured state residents who once sought sporadic care through expensive emergency rooms. Now many of these patients come to health centers for regular doctor visits and to take advantage of programs that help them quit smoking, eat healthier and manage complex illnesses like diabetes and asthma.

Impact

National health reform could go a long way in helping to strengthen Massachusetts' community-based health care system. If passed, national reform means the potential of millions of dollars in resources to 36 federally-funded health centers over the next five years to ensure that they are able to sustain and expand their care to growing numbers of newly insured residents; create community-based residency training programs to encourage medical and nursing school students to pursue careers in primary care; and enhance their use of information technology to help tackle some of the biggest cost-drivers in our health care system: chronic disease, obesity and smoking.

Issue

Not all Massachusetts community health centers receive federal grants and therefore remain ineligible for much of this funding.

Solution

The Commonwealth has seen the benefits of investing in the community health center network over time: expanded health access for patients, cost-containing approaches to managing care and increased health and well-being for lower income residents. By focusing on the needs of non-federally funded health centers, the state can leverage federal investments in ensuring the goals of Massachusetts' first-in-the-nation state reform model.