

Background

Community health centers offer cost effective, high quality primary and preventive care and chronic disease management to more than 750,000 medically underserved Massachusetts' residents. We are the state's first line of defense in managing chronic disease and spiraling healthcare costs. New information technologies such as electronic medical records play an important role in helping us meet our mission. Because of our focus on quality, maximizing the latest information technology will improve our ability to track a range of measurable health statistics in a more data driven way. These measures include reducing ER visits and hospital readmissions; decreasing smoking and obesity rates; and improving care for people with chronic diseases such as diabetes and asthma.

Impact

The Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers has taken a strong role in assisting health centers as they work to upgrade their health information technology systems and capacity for using data. To date, 44 of Massachusetts' 52 health centers have either purchased, implemented or are in the process of implementing their electronic practice management systems (EPM) and electronic medical records (EMR). All centers will be working toward the new federal "meaningful use" standards, which mandate significant and measurable improvements in patient health outcomes over the next two years.

Additionally, in 2009, the League released CHIA DRVS™, a web-based central data repository and reporting solution for seven pilot health centers. The system extracts data from three EMR and four EPM systems nightly, and has the capability for producing more than 20 quality reports and measuring 20 health center-specific key performance indicators. Health centers are able to benchmark and compare their data at a range of levels: within health centers, health center to health center and provider to provider.

Issue

Providing broad support for the implementation of EMR across the health center network will enhance innovative care management initiatives and ultimately ensure the success of health care reform in low-income communities. In many ways, Massachusetts' community health centers have made significant headway in planning for, obtaining and implementing EMR. However, eight community health centers have inadequate resources to purchase or implement EMR, and another four face the expense of replacing outdated systems.

Solution

Direct investments from state stimulus funds for the purchase and implementation of EMR systems at these eight health centers, as well as access to technical assistance through the Regional Extension Centers established with ARRA support, will help speed our efforts in working toward 100% EMR implementation and meaningful use across the health center network to enhance the health of our patients.

Background

The state's rising unemployment rate, which recently reached its highest level in 25 years, has unraveled communities across the Commonwealth. Low-income cities and towns — perhaps the hardest hit by the economic turmoil — are reeling as the opportunities for employment are few and families in crisis are many. Nowhere are the effects more apparent than at Massachusetts' Community Health Centers. Health centers already provide primary and preventive care to one out of every 9 residents, yet inquiries and appointment requests are on the rise.

President Obama and Congress have taken note. Working together, they recently distributed \$2 billion to federally funded health centers across the country. In Massachusetts, 36 out of 52 facilities statewide received a combined \$117 million to hire new doctors; begin long-planned and needed renovation projects and technology upgrades; extend their hours of care; and create and retain jobs for community residents who are struggling to stay afloat in a sinking economy.

In addition to employing nearly 10,000 individuals, health centers also provide critical entry level jobs and training and career building opportunities right in the communities they serve. When looking at their overall economic impact on the state's economy, Massachusetts' community health centers stimulated \$1.3 billion in total output, generated \$833 million in household income and supported more than 13,000 jobs in 2008.

Impact

So far, community health centers have increased access for more than 34,000 new patients and created or retained 231 full-time equivalent positions in the 36 health centers receiving federal stimulus funding. This is remarkable in light of the fact that health centers are still in the early stages of planning and deploying a range of capital projects that involve new construction, renovation and state-of-the-art information technology implementations.

Issue

Not all Massachusetts' community health centers receive federal grants and therefore remain ineligible for ARRA funding. While stimulus funds are a one-time, temporary investment in some health centers, the Commonwealth has long seen the benefits of investing in all community health centers to build economic strength from the grassroots to the top-roots. Continued public support for these foundational organizations will pay significant health and economic dividends for thousands of people across the Commonwealth — both now and down the road.

Solution

By dedicating a portion of its stimulus funds for health centers, the state can leverage federal investments while reaping much greater rewards than a typical one-time expenditure. The overall impact would directly benefit Massachusetts' hardest hit cities and towns, stabilizing neighborhoods through increased economic activity and improving access to critical health services for the uninsured.