




PACHC Memo 12-02

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July 24, 2012


TO: Chief Executive Officers of Pennsylvania Community Health Centers  and Rural Health Clinics

FROM: Cheri Rinehart, President & CEO

SUBJECT: PACHC Advocacy Initiative

SUMMARY: As PACHC continues to develop our advocacy and government relations program and provide more public education on community health centers, we are announcing several initiatives that will enhance our efforts and effectiveness on your behalf.

BACKGROUND: As you are aware, we have worked hard at PACHC to improve the quality and effectiveness of many aspects of the association and consequently, the value of membership. For example, we have improved communication through our weekly publication, *News CHCs Can Use*; we have improved both the quantity and quality of our education and training programs; we have ramped up the technical assistance, resource and data support we can offer; and we have created the foundation of a robust program to support you in meeting your workforce needs. We prioritized these initiatives based on the feedback you provided through the Membership Satisfaction & Needs Assessment Surveys you completed. Our next area of focus for improvement is government relations and advocacy.

Community Health Centers  and rural health clinics (RHC) continue to enjoy broad-based, bipartisan support in both the state legislature and Congress; however, as an advocate for your centers we must have ongoing outreach to ensure that lawmakers understand the full range of services offered to your patients/their constituents. As part of this effort, we have already implemented the following enhancements:

- Hiring a full-time policy director, Jim Willshier
- Contracting with a new government relations firm, Bravo Group, and working closely with registered lobbyist, Anne Hart, with that group

- Developing a regular Legislative/Regulatory/Policy Committee schedule with invited guest speakers for informed discussions
- Hosting a successful 2012 Spring Meeting and advocacy and education program in the state capitol
- Successful legislative visits with the Congressional delegation as part of NACHC's 2012 Policy and Issues Forum

With guidance from our Legislative/Regulatory/Policy and our Payment Policy committees, the feedback you provided through the 2012 Membership Satisfaction & Needs Assessment Survey, and our governing board, PACHC is now moving forward to the next level with implementation of additional advocacy tools to significantly enhance our efforts to support you and advance our overall message.

Advocacy and education on health centers is always important, but perhaps never more so than now, as at the state and national levels we move forward with implementation of the Affordable Care Act (ACA). The ACA presents both challenges and opportunities and in many cases the issues it presents can be either, depending on how effective we are as a "community of Community Health Centers" in working in partnership with policymakers in policy development and implementation. In the next few years, health centers will be significantly impacted by the decisions made regarding:

- Medicaid expansion, which because of the U.S. Supreme Court ruling on the ACA is at the state's discretion and, if implemented, could decrease the number of uninsured in the commonwealth by more than 500,000 individuals;
- Medicaid payment policy, which will continue to challenge your productivity and financial health if we don't stay on top of and work to influence the policy decisions being made to modify Medical Assistance benefits;
- Health insurance exchange development in Pennsylvania, which could decrease the uncompensated care burden carried by health centers;
- Health information exchange development in Pennsylvania, which could facilitate exchange of relevant information across health care settings, allowing us to be better partners in the continuum of care, have better data to support decision-making and better control utilization and healthcare costs;
- Development of a new Medicare payment methodology for health centers, a process which will use the data submitted today through the HCPCS codes you are required to provide to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) when billing for Medicare patients;
- Reassessment of health center grants, the Health Resources & Services Administration is already being challenged to justify the grant you receive and whether it is still justified when more of your patients are insured with full ACA implementation in 2014.

These are just a few of the myriad of issues we are working on for you, because we know they will impact not only your health center but also the health center goal of providing access to affordable, quality primary health care for all.

MEMBER ACTION: An effective advocacy and education government relations program cannot be built without you and your grassroots advocacy. To optimize our effectiveness, we encourage you to:

- 1- If you're not on a PACHC committee, please consider joining one. If you are, participate and actively engage in committee discussions.
- 2- Attend PACHC-sponsored events—it is a great way to work as a “community of Community Health Centers,” to get to know and get ideas from your colleagues and to get the latest information on issues that will have an impact on your health center.
- 3- Contact Jim Willshier, our Director of Policy & Partnership, to discuss interests and options as well as ideas to build on your effectiveness at the local level.
- 4- Take the time to review and respond to draft policy and regulation when it is presented. We do our best to analyze the impact of proposals on health centers, but insights from those who will have to implement the proposals are invaluable. When a policy or regulation is final it is too late, and we often have to live with the consequences for years.
- 5- If you haven't already, please pay your government relations assessment. The assessment reflects the shared cost by the “community of Community Health Centers” to engage a government relations firm to monitor activity, represent our interests and open necessary doors at the Capitol.

In the immediate term, we recommend you consider doing the following:

- Contact your state legislator (House and Senate) to ask if they plan to host a community fair in their district and offer your health center's participation. This can be a great way to gain public exposure within the community and enhance your relationship with your legislator.
- Offer a health center tour to both incumbents and challengers. Reach out to the candidates that are running in your district to offer a courtesy invitation and be sure that the same message and equal opportunity is provided to each candidate or their staff.
- Consider a voter engagement campaign at your health center. Review with your staff and board whether there is an interest in engaging in a voter registration campaign this year. For more information, see attached Voter Registration Guide and contact Jim Willshier.
- Celebrate National Health Center Week in ways that are visible to your community and invite your legislators and other key individuals to participate.

PACHC ACTION: With guidance from our board and committees, PACHC will:

- Continue our regular quarterly meetings with key individuals within the Department of Public Welfare.
- Monitor state ACA implementation activities, meet with key ACA implementation decision makers and work to have health center representation on key committees.
- Provide regular updates to you on policy proposals, opportunities and decisions that will impact health centers.
- Develop a more exciting and hands-on opportunity to promote National Health Center Week and optimize the impact of the week as a “community of Community Health Centers.”

- Redevelop our website to offer you more resources to support your grassroots work, enhanced access to legislative/regulatory materials, and enhanced support to submit public comments. We will also add additional materials designed specifically to provide general education to legislative staff and the public.
- Regularly post video briefings that summarize key issues for the public and policy-makers to have access to and better understand pressing matters for health centers.
- Support and help organize voter registration and Get Out the Vote campaigns in collaboration with interested health centers. We will provide support in partnership with NACHC and the Department of State to discuss Act 18 of 2012 (new state law requiring identification at polling places), including access to voter registration cards and as appropriate absentee ballots and guidance on training for voter registration.
- Offer legislative candidate information on PACHC's website to support voters in making more informed voting decisions.
- Develop a legislative priorities survey to distribute to the entire membership this fall to gauge critical issues and related components to help guide the development of the policy positions PACHC will take next year. These will also be incorporated into the 2013 Spring Meeting and shared with policymakers as part of the budget process.
- Collect data and information necessary to support policy positions identified as priority issues by health centers.
- Coordinate with health centers to make formal outreach to newly elected legislators in December and January to continue public education and develop opportunities to work with these legislators as they enter office.
- Establish editorial board meetings statewide to discuss community health centers.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: As with our other improvement initiatives, PACHC welcomes your input and feedback. I encourage you to contact our Director of Policy and Partnership, Jim Willshier, at jim@pachc.com or (717) 761-6443, ext. 206 for more information or to offer suggestions. For those who are interested, the PACHC Legislative/Regulatory/Policy Committee is open to any and all members and meets quarterly on Thursday mornings via conference call. Together, we are more effective. Together, we can ensure a healthy future for the health center program.