

Health center services at risk if Congress fails to renew funding

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If Congress does not renew a critical fund for community health centers before September 30, these safety net providers could lose 70 percent of their federal grant funding by 2018. As a result 9 million people could lose access to health care, according to a report produced by researchers at the Geiger Gibson/RCHN Community Health Foundation Research Collaborative at the George Washington University's Milken Institute School of Public Health (Milken Institute SPH). The new report also predicts that cutting funds to community health centers would lead to site closures, a loss of 51,000 health care jobs and an economic downturn in communities located throughout the U.S.

"The patients served by the nation's federally supported [community health](#) centers are among the nation's neediest, and the Community Health Center Fund is intended to ensure that these centers have a reliable source of funding to reach these vulnerable populations and communities," said Sara Rosenbaum, one of the report's co-authors and the Harold and Jane Hirsh Professor of Health Law and Policy at Milken Institute SPH. "Loss of this federal funding could cause 2,800 [health](#) center sites located in rural and urban communities alike to close their doors, leaving an estimated 9 million people, including children and the elderly, without the [health care](#) they need to stay healthy."

The centers supported by the Community Health Center Fund served nearly 26 million people at more than 10,400 sites in 2016. The centers at greatest risk are the smallest centers, those located in rural areas and in states that did not opt to expand their Medicaid funding. Like the

Children's Health Insurance Program, also set to expire at the end of the government's fiscal year on September 30, the health center program enjoys broad bipartisan support.

Additional key findings from the new report include:

- Between 2000 and 2016, the number of health centers grew by 87 percent. The scope of services is also broad; in 2016, 87 percent of centers offered behavioral health care while 80 percent offered dental care. If the Community Health Center Fund is not renewed, essential treatment to combat public health crises such as the opioid epidemic could be scaled back.
- Over the past decade, staffing at community health centers grew by 113 percent, bringing jobs and economic development to medically underserved communities. More than 207,500 full-time-equivalent staff are now employed at community health centers, a figure that could decline by 51,000 if the Community Health Center Fund is not renewed.
- Without the Community Health Center Fund, revenue at the nation's community health centers would be reduced by 13 percent. In states without Medicaid expansion, revenue would drop by 19 percent, community health centers in rural areas would see 17 percent less revenue, and revenue would decline by 27 percent in small health centers serving fewer than 5,000 people.

The report estimates that the national economic impact of losing the Community Health Center Fund translates to \$7.5 billion in lost revenue nationwide.

"Without continued support, community health centers will not be able to meet the demand for primary care in underserved parts of the United States," said Feygele Jacobs, DrPH, President and CEO of the RCHN

Community Health Foundation. "Unless policymakers act now to extend the Community Health Center Fund, many Americans will be left without the high-quality services they need, and care that can prevent many expensive health conditions from developing in the first place."

More information: The report, "What are the Possible Effects of Failing to Extend the Health Center Fund?" can be accessed [here](#).

Provided by George Washington University

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