Create level playing field for Community-Based Health Care Program

Background
In 2013, Pennsylvania adopted the Community-Based Health Care Act to establish a grant program within the Department of Health for safety-net providers to expand or create new sites. Over the years, this program has been used by many provider types to support opportunities that increase access to care. Unfortunately, the legislation imposed a statutory cap on Community Health Centers (FQHC), also known as Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), to be eligible for no more than 25% of the grant funding.

We strongly believe that the playing field for organizations eligible for the funding should be level and that the state has a fiduciary responsibility to fund the best applications and not allocate funding based on an arbitrary and unnecessary cap. The best applications should be funded, regardless of provider type.

In 2018, Community Health Centers provided medical, dental or behavioral health care services to over 870,000 vulnerable individuals in need of care, including children, veterans and the elderly. As a result of the quality primary health care these individuals receive in health centers, they have improved quality of life and costly emergency and hospital care can be avoided.

Unlike the majority of states, Pennsylvania provides no direct funding to Community Health Centers, making equal opportunity in applying for one-time grant funding through the Community-Based Health Care Act even more essential to help expand access through additional sites and services in underserved rural and urban communities.

Policy Considerations
• In a recent George Washington University study, Community Health Centers were found to reduce costs to the health system by $1,263 per individual per year, which extrapolates to a savings of more than $1 billion in Pennsylvania.
• Pennsylvania provides NO direct state funding to Community Health Centers – unlike a majority of other states that provide direct support to health centers.
• The Department of Health’s competitive Community-Based Health Care grant program is a unique opportunity to help providers in the safety-net reach more patients in need and currently the program only has a statutory limit on one category of provider: Community Health Centers.
• Previous legislation (HB 644 of 2017) to remove the 25% cap on health centers received unanimous and bi-partisan support in both chambers.

Legislative Action
We urge swift passage of Senate Bill 273 without amendment to allow a level playing field for Community Health Centers to receive DOH Community-Based Health Care grant funding.

Pennsylvania Association of Community Health Centers (PACHC) is a statewide membership services organization representing Community Health Centers, the largest primary care network in Pennsylvania.