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Commentary

Community health centers deserve our gratitude

Angela F. Brown | STL Regional Health Commission

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Many of us, including me, check COVID-19 rates constantly, watching the red bar dip and soar with anticipation. Our front-line workers carry an additional burden; they also count more grieving families in their waiting rooms and witness the increased anxiety in the eyes of sick patients.

For the past year and a half, community health centers have stepped up in the face of fear and devastation to protect the health of our region. When health centers noticed a dearth of COVID 19 testing in North St. Louis County and the city of St. Louis, free testing sites were established to promote equitable access.



When vaccination sites were limited for their patients, health centers joined hospitals in pioneering efforts to ensure communities could receive immunizations. They have collaborated with multiple community non-profits to provide health care and COVID-19 vaccines to especially vulnerable groups, such as the homeless. They have accomplished this while continuing to offer critical health care services, such as diabetes management, women’s wellness exams, and behavioral health treatment.

Dr. Clay Dunagan, St. Louis Metropolitan Pandemic Task Force leader, recently expressed his gratitude.

“St. Louis' community health centers have long been key resources in caring for the citizens of our region, working tirelessly to provide preventive services, chronic disease care, behavioral health treatment, and other safety net services,” he said.

“When the COVID pandemic struck our region, they were ready and able to confront the new challenges we faced. Community health centers were at ground zero in the first, and subsequent waves of the pandemic, ready to meet every challenge.

“They stood up with testing and then vaccination operations in communities of significant need, while continuing to deliver other clinical services. We are so fortunate to have these dedicated providers caring for so many of our most vulnerable citizens.”



The second week of August was National Health Center Week, and it provided an opportunity to offer extra gratitude to our community health centers providers and staff. I cannot think of a better way to show appreciation to our health centers than by financially supporting their ability to care for the uninsured and underserved.

About a year ago, Missourians voted to expand Medicaid. Now, Missourians who make \$1,481 a month or less could qualify for Medicaid. Expansion is not only a major win for the health of Missourians, but also for our health care safety net.

Our community health centers were struggling without expansion. In 2019, one in three patients at St. Louis community health centers were uninsured, putting financial strain on the organizations. Medicaid expansion serves as a needed lifeline and will help health centers continue to provide quality care to our community. But our support cannot end there. We must continue uplifting our health centers with state and federal support to keep their doors open.

We at the St. Louis Regional Health Commission stand with partners across the region in gratitude for our community health centers. Bethany Johnson-Javois, CEO of the Saint Louis Integrated Health Network (IHN), amplifies our shared appreciation.

“It is not lost on IHN that our health centers take their mission-driven purpose seriously every single day. Despite it all, you care for our community. Now, it’s your turn to know that we care about you,” she said.

To all the community health center workers, thank you. Your dedication, selflessness, and compassion are noticed and appreciated.

For more information about the St. Louis Regional Health Commission, visit www.stlrhc.org or call Angela Brown at 314-446-6452.

Angela F. Brown is CEO of the St. Louis Regional Health Commission, a non-profit organization with a mission to increase access to health care for people who are medically uninsured and underinsured.

