Senate/H.R. 2 Op-Ed template: 567 words

Even as more Americans gain health insurance coverage, a serious healthcare problem persists nationwide: a shortage of places to go to get the primary and preventive care services that everyone needs. A key part of the solution lies in our nation’s Community Health Centers, which have provided quality, affordable care for the past five decades. But these vital safety net programs will only continue if the Senate acts now to ensure their survival.

A cornerstone of Community Health Centers’ success is sustained federal investment, which allows every local health center to leverage considerable non-federal resources to serve their communities and be accountable for their performance. And there is a return on that investment: health centers save the U.S. healthcare system more than $24 billion every year in reduced overall costs from preventable hospitalizations and avoidable emergency room visits—a figure that dwarfs the federal investments made in their operations—while also generating $26.5 billion in economic activity for their communities

Yet even with this successful track record, the future for health centers is uncertain because of a “funding cliff.” Health centers are at risk of losing a major source of federal funding, which is set to expire on Oct. 1, 2015. Without action by Congress, health centers face up to a 70 percent reduction in federal support. A [recent report](http://www.nachc.com/client/PI_50th.pdf) by the National Association of Community Health Centers (NACHC) reveals that the funding cliff would cause 7.4 million patients to lose access to care at their local health center, while nearly 57,000 clinicians and staff would also lose their jobs. [DESCRIBE HOW YOUR HEALTH CENTER WILL BE AFFECTED].

Such a result seems all the more unthinkable in light of studies estimating that some 62 million people in America have little or no access to a primary care provider in their communities.

Since their inception fifty years ago, health centers have demonstrated impressive results in reducing infant mortality, improving immunization rates, developing programs for early screening and treatment of cancer, and managing chronic conditions such as obesity and diabetes. Today, health centers serve more than 23 million Americans, including about 7 million children and 260,000 veterans – providing quality medical, dental, behavioral health and vision care in more than 9,200 communities across the country.

Health centers are one of the bright spots in our healthcare system. Thankfully, last month an overwhelming bipartisan majority of House lawmakers recognized this and passed legislation (H.R.2), which not only makes crucial investments in health centers but also in programs necessary to train and recruit the next generation of health center clinicians. We are especially thankful for our local representatives [NAME OF US Representatives who voted for H.R. 2] for their leadership and support by voting for H.R. 2. Now it is up to the Senate to act swiftly when they return from spring recess and we are counting on [NAME OF SENATORS IN YOUR STATE] for their support of H.R. 2 to ensure our local health centers do not face these scheduled drastic funding reductions.

The 114th Congress took office with a pledge to find solutions that work, and to work across the aisle to get things done for the American people. Let’s hope the Senate continues the momentum and acts without delay to follow suit with the House by passing H.R. 2 to ensure health centers continue to serve people in need for the next 50 years and well into the future.