

What is a Community Health Center?

Health Center Program Fundamentals



The Health Center Program is authorized under Section 330 of the Public Health Service (PHS) Act.



5. CHCs collaborate with other providers and organizations to maximize resources and efficiencies.

6. And lastly, they are accountable to HRSA for their performance on meeting needs, efficient operations and clinical outcomes.

North Olympic Healthcare Network (NOHN) was founded in 2015 after transforming a longtime private clinic, Family Medicine of Port Angeles, into the CHC model in an attempt to address the community's longstanding health care access needs more effectively. NOHN is the newest of Washington State's 27 CHCs and the only one on the North Olympic Peninsula. Under the CHC model, NOHN has been successful in attracting over 20 new medical providers to the community and has expanded the range of services available to include dental care, behavioral health, and now eye care. It has been able to provide medical home access for an additional 11,500 patients since 2016, now caring for more than 16,000 patients and adding another 100-200 patients each month.

Ensuring community access to high-quality and comprehensive health care is NOHN's primary goal and underlies its mission "to provide patient-centered, quality-driven, whole-person healthcare services that are accessible to everyone in the community." ■

By NOHN Staff

In a nutshell, a Community Health Center (CHC) is a non-profit, community-based and patient-directed organization that serves those with limited access to healthcare. CHCs are sometimes referred to as "Federally Qualified Health Centers" because being a CHC requires a federal designation from the Health Services Resources Administration (HRSA), given only after a rigorous and competitive evaluation process. CHCs retain this special designated status by meeting high quality, service, compliance, and accountability standards on an ongoing basis.

The health center program started in 1964 as part of the Civil Rights Act to help bring health services to medically underserved areas in rural and urban America. The program began with two health centers – in rural Mississippi and inner-city Boston – and has since grown to over 1,400 health centers nationwide. Collectively, health centers serve 30 million people, including 8 million children and 350,000 veterans, and comprise one of the country's largest health systems.

Every CHC is unique and reflects the particular needs of the communities they serve. However, there are six fundamental elements common to all health centers:

1. They all serve communities with high medical needs.

2. Health Centers must provide a comprehensive scope of services that are delivered in a coordinated and integrated manner.

3. They are non-profits governed by a board comprised primarily by patients — so patients have an active role in directing those services.

4. A core requirement and value is that no one is turned away from care and services are available to all, with fees adjusted based upon ability to pay.