

## **State's Community Health Centers Show Caution Amid Funding Uncertainties**

Some community health centers serving low-income patients in New York are scaling back their plans as they await a long-term federal funding plan.

Congress, which allowed the centers' federal grant funding to lapse at the end of September, approved an eleventh-hour fix in December that provides stopgap funding through March 31, along with temporary funding for the Children's Health Insurance Program.

"We've heard from some of our centers that they're not going forward with programs they had planned for the coming year," said Rose Duhan, president and chief executive of the Community Health Care Association of New York State.

HRHCare, a system of 28 health centers serving more than 150,000 patients annually in the Hudson Valley and on Long Island, has already identified the services it would cut if the federal funds aren't renewed in time.

"We know that the health centers have experienced a tremendous history of bipartisan support," said Allison Dubois, chief operating officer of HRHCare. "What we're worried about is that there's so much else happening with the national conversation that this may get overlooked. These are critical resources we use to provide services every day."

About \$14.6 million is at risk for HRHCare, representing 8.7% of the organization's budget. If that dries up, programs that would be impacted include dental care for the uninsured, an initiative to integrate behavioral health and primary care, and medication-assisted treatment for people addicted to opioids, said Dubois. Insurance alone doesn't cover the extensive wraparound services necessary to practice the addiction treatment effectively, she explained.

Federally qualified health centers that serve a large homeless population face particular financial challenges because they serve higher numbers of uninsured patients and have longer visits with each patient, said Aaron Felder, director of health care operations and planning at Project Renewal. The Manhattan-based organization, which provides health services in homeless shelters and mobile vans, receives about half of its revenue through the federal grant program, Felder said.

Although Felder is optimistic that a long-term funding agreement will be reached in Congress, he said Project Renewal must act cautiously. Despite the city's growing homeless population, Felder said, Project Renewal is "slowing down the pace at which we would consider taking on new projects."

He added, "we don't want to assume risk when we don't know the degree to which we'll be able to cover our operating expenses." —C.L.