



*Strengthening Oklahoma's Safety Net,  
One Community At A Time*

## **Board Bulletin**

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### **Your Role in Statewide Strategic CHC Growth**

In 2001, the *Presidential Initiative to Expand Community Health Centers* (CHCs) was announced with the two-pronged goal of 1) creating 1,200 new sites and 2) doubling the number of CHC patients. This month President Bush celebrated the creation of 1,236 new or expanded health center sites since 2001. The number of patients served by CHCs in 2006 topped the 15 million mark, almost a 50% increase in five years. In Oklahoma, CHC sites have grown from 6 to 26 statewide with the number of patients served more than doubling in five years. Certainly, we have reason to celebrate. However, with over 700,000 uninsured and an additional 600,000+ Medicaid recipients, there is still much to do to ensure that all Oklahomans have a medical home.

#### **CHC Growth Considerations**

CHC boards play a crucial role in increasing access and reducing health disparities in Oklahoma. With continued congressional support, the future of CHC growth seems certain the next few years. Policymakers understand that investment in existing CHCs, with an established infrastructure, allows health care dollars to be directed to patient care rather than duplicating expensive operating systems. Expanding existing CHCs will most likely take precedence over establishing new starts. CHC boards must be ready for growth opportunity.

◆ **Purpose** – Know your mission, understand your vision. Where does your CHC fit in the big picture of increasing access to health care? How will the CHC improve capacity to better serve the target population? Does your organization have a goal of establishing a regional presence, reaching out to new communities?

◆ **Plan** – Once you know where you want to go organizationally, a solid map of how to get there must be developed. Strategic planning must include future expansion goals that use a combination of new access points, expanded medical capacity or service expansions. Study HRSA/BPHC growth opportunity patterns when planning. As legendary Coach John Wooden so aptly put it, "When your opportunity comes, it's too late to prepare." CHCs must proactively determine a growth plan and be ready to seize opportunity.

◆ **Prepare** – CHCs cannot expect to open a new site in a neighboring community if their own 'backyard' is not in optimum order. Operational readiness and organizational capacity are crucial to CHC success. An organization-wide evaluation should be done annually to measure performance of board and staff. Patient satisfaction surveys should be routinely conducted. Boards must take necessary measures to ensure that the CEO and senior management are moving toward operational excellence. CHCs hoping to garner support from neighboring communities must be respected as a valuable health care provider in their own community first.

◆ **Position** – To successfully establish a new access point, strategic positioning is required. Federal funding notices require only a 30-day window before the deadline for grant submission. CHCs cannot wait until notice issuance to begin discussing expansion plans with neighboring communities. Once the strategic plan identifies communities in need of expanded services, CHC board members and senior management must begin dialogue with civic leaders (mayors, city council, county commissioners) to discuss CHC growth plans. Relationships with the community must be fostered to garner support for the CHC project. One component of the grant requires collaborations with local providers – something that takes much longer than a month to accomplish.

◆ **Promote** – One role of a board member is to be an ambassador for the CHC. A strong board presence is indicative of a healthy organization. At a recent town hall meeting, the board chair of the CHC proposing an expansion site to the new community spoke with conviction about the health center program. There is no better spokesperson for the CHC than a volunteer community board member – someone who is not paid to do a job but rather embraces the health center concept of high quality, affordable health care for all. While board members are cautioned to have one spokesperson when it comes to media events, all board members should be CHC ambassadors actively engaged in continual program education in preparation of sharing the message with others. CHCs need board members who will promote their good work and advocate for increased support.

To review OPCA's entire *Board Bulletin* series, visit the 'CHC Boards' section of [www.okpca.org](http://www.okpca.org).

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