



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

## **Board Bulletin**

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### **Bracing for the Storm of Activity**

Health care reform was the hot topic of 2009 - hands down. From Congressional halls to coffee shops, intense health care debates continue. The United States spends more money on health care than any other nation and yet patient outcomes fall dismally short in comparison. Those to the left and right of the aisle recognize that something has to give. Change is on the horizon and headed this way. Just as the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) brought an onslaught of opportunity to community health centers (CHCs), so will health care reform efforts. Reports indicate that there will be significant funding for the CHC program to focus on prevention and timely treatment - a return on investment worthy of increased support. CHCs must take action now to brace for the storm, preparing for an effective response to the flurry of activity that lies ahead.

#### **Storm Readiness Measures**

“Those who fail to plan should plan to fail.” If CHC boards want to successfully weather the coming storm, the following will be done – not for survival alone but rather to position health centers for excellence:

- *Assess Current State* – CHC boards should engage in annual health center evaluation performance and organizational assessment. Is the CHC meeting its mission? Is the target population being served with high quality, affordable health care? Will patients continue to seek health care from the CHC even if they become insured and have other options? Have staff satisfaction surveys been conducted? Are providers recognized as competent, compassionate clinicians within the community? Is the staff friendly and mission-minded? Is the board recognized as competent and credible? Is the facility being maintained and updated to serve as an acceptable medical home? Are billing systems maximizing resources? Is health information technology (HIT) being addressed to keep pace with payor expectations? Is the CHC moving toward HIT ‘meaningful use’ to capitalize on upcoming incentives (avoiding future punitive action for non-compliance)?
- *Identify Vulnerable Areas* – Look for areas of weakness that expose the CHC to the most risk when facing stormy change. For example, if revenues are down, find out if it is due to poor collection, patient decline or provider productivity issues? Identify the root cause and initiate action necessary to decrease vulnerability.
- *Fortify Home Front* – Just as flight attendants direct passengers to secure their own oxygen masks first before helping others, CHCs must ensure that the home front is in top working order before considering expansions. Neighboring communities may approach CHCs to propose a satellite for their residents via a New Access Point (NAP) grant. CHCs should only consider growth if the ‘mother organization’ is financially and operationally healthy - never viewing expansion funding as a means to improve organizational viability. Establishing a new site is resource intensive, requiring 330 funding plus existing resources
- *Develop Plan* – Once a thorough assessment has been conducted and weak links identified, CHC boards must develop a strategic plan that will correct deficiencies, achieve the mission and fulfill the organizational vision. For healthy organizations with minimal weaknesses, growth strategies may be considered. The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) encourages 330 CHCs to increase access to underserved areas. It may be that the current site is in need of Expanded Medical Capacity (EMC) funding to secure additional providers to meet growing patient demand. CHCs considering EMC funding should understand that the proposed project must be within their current scope. If increased patient access can be achieved through Service Expansion funding (e.g., oral, behavioral or pharmacy), this would be the grant to pursue. For healthy CHCs, a combination of funding applications may be appropriate. CHCs cannot wait until funding becomes available to have a plan as grant application deadlines have a short turnaround time.
- *Stand Ready* – If CHCs have done proper homework in advance, they will be ready to execute the plan when the funding storm comes. Do not wait until you are in the eye of the hurricane to take action or try to plan.

“The only way to predict the future is to have power to shape the future,” Eric Hoffer, American philosopher. CHCs, through honest assessment and careful planning, can be positioned to seize opportunities that will shape their future. To review OKPCA’s entire *Board Bulletin* series, visit the ‘CHC Boards’ section of [www.okpca.org](http://www.okpca.org).

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