

Press Release

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Affordable Care Act Expansions Poised to Improve Women's Health Community Health Centers Face Challenge and Opportunity

WASHINGTON and NEW YORK (March 5, 2012) — A new article by researchers from the Geiger Gibson/RCHN Community Health Foundation Research Collaborative in the Department of Health Policy at the George Washington University School of Public Health and Health Services examines the multiple opportunities provided by the Affordable Care Act (ACA) to improve the health of low-income women through the use of community health centers. Appearing as a commentary piece in the March 7, 2012 issue of the journal *Women's Health Issues*, "Opportunities and Challenges for Community Health Centers in Meeting Women's Health Care Needs," also outlines the challenges many community health centers face because of primary care workforce shortages and federal funding cuts.

"The Affordable Care Act finally bolsters meaningful access to care for women and expands the role of health centers in providing comprehensive primary care. What we need to do now is to bolster efforts to address the primary care workforce shortage, especially in communities at high risk for poor health and pregnancy outcomes," said Associate Professor Peter Shin, Ph.D., M.P.H., lead author of this article and Director of the Geiger Gibson/RCHN Community Health Foundation Research Collaborative at GW.

Community health centers today serve nearly 20 million low-income patients, a majority of whom are women with incomes below 200% of the federal poverty level. In comparison to those who seek care in other primary care settings, patients served by community health centers are disproportionately poor and uninsured. Further, community health centers effectively function as "one-stop shops" that provide a full complement of essential primary care services to their patients. The ACA, which will significantly expand insurance coverage under Medicaid and private Exchange plans and mandate coverage for key preventive services, will serve to extend access to primary care, potentially allowing community health centers to more fully address the health care needs of approximately 10 million additional, newly-insured women.

Additionally, the ACA sets aside \$11 billion for investments in building primary care infrastructure and increasing capacity, but the ever-changing political landscape and continued workforce shortages both remain serious barriers to full access to critical health care services by women in America today.

"Health centers today provide high quality, comprehensive care to more than 11 million women in low-income, high-need communities across the country," said Julio Bellber, president and CEO of the RCHN Community Health Foundation. "This number can be greatly expanded with continued investments in the health center program, and a focus on addressing the workforce and other challenges that hinder growth."

To read this commentary, visit: <http://www.whijournal.com/article/S1049-3867%2812%2900006-0/fulltext>.

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About the RCHN Community Health Foundation

The RCHN Community Health Foundation, founded in October 2005, is a not-for-profit foundation whose mission is to support community health centers through strategic investment, outreach, education, and cutting-edge health policy research. The only foundation in the country dedicated to community health centers, the Foundation builds on health centers' 40-year commitment to the provision of accessible, high quality, community-based healthcare services for underserved and medically vulnerable populations. The Foundation's gift to the Geiger Gibson program supports health center research and scholarship. For more information on RCHN CHF, visit www.rchnfoundation.org.

About the Geiger Gibson / RCHN Community Health Foundation Research Collaborative

The Geiger Gibson Program in Community Health Policy, established in 2003 and named after human rights and health center pioneers Drs. H. Jack Geiger and Count Gibson, is part of the School of Public Health and Health Services at The George Washington University. It focuses on the history and contributions of health centers and the major policy issues that affect health centers, their communities, and the patients that they serve. Additional information about the Research Collaborative can be found online at www.gwumc.edu/sphhs/departments/healthpolicy/ggprogram or at www.rchnfoundation.org.

About the George Washington University School of Public Health and Health Services:

Established in July 1997, the School of Public Health and Health Services brought together three longstanding university programs in the schools of medicine, business, and education that we have since expanded substantially. Today, more than 1,100 students from nearly every U.S. state and more than 40 nations pursue undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral-level degrees in public health. Our student body is one of the most ethnically diverse among the nation's private schools of public health. <http://sphhs.gwumc.edu/>