



PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

August 13, 2015

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The Rhode Island Health Center Association Celebrates National Health Center Week 2015 Event is Part of National Campaign Celebrating 50 Years of Success in Healthcare Delivery

Providence, RI – The Rhode Island Health Center Association (RIHCA) and Rhode Island’s community health centers marked National Health Center Week 2015 with a Celebration of Community Health Centers: Celebrating our Legacy, Shaping Our Future. The event was part of a weeklong campaign (August 9-15) to celebrate the mission and accomplishments of America’s Health Centers. The celebration at Providence Community Health Centers recognized the legacy of community health centers nationally and in Rhode Island by honoring prominent health center alumni and Rhode Island’s congressional delegation.

“The community health centers were founded to provide health care that is directly responsive to each community’s individual needs,” said Jane A. Hayward, President and CEO of the Rhode Island Health Center Association. “Today we celebrate that history, and we see how Rhode Island’s community health centers are growing in direct response to each community’s needs. The community health centers have a legacy of providing health care to underserved communities, creating access to health care, and inspiration to the next generation of health care providers, some of whom return to work in community health centers.”

Dr. Jose Polanco, medical director of adult ambulatory services at Rhode Island Hospital, emigrated from the Dominican Republic as a child. After arriving in Providence, Dr. Polanco was a patient at Providence Community Health Centers, and later medical director at Blackstone Valley Community Health Care. Of the community health centers, Dr. Polanco said that “The transformation that’s taken place in the last 50 years at the health centers is incredible. And I believe the next 50 will be even more challenging and exciting at the same time. I’ll never forget what the health centers did for me and what they continue to do for me today. I will always be ready to work to help move forward in the work we are all doing to better the lives of our communities.”

As a part of the celebration, the association, together with the National Association of Community Health Centers, presented the members of Rhode Island’s congressional delegation with awards for their ongoing support of community health centers.

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“I support community health centers because they provide critical care for so many Rhode Islanders and generate significant health savings for taxpayers. Our community health centers are a critical resource, particularly in underserved communities, and they’ve been instrumental in expanding access to health and dental care, and preventative services for those in need. Together, we are working to ensure every citizen has access to quality, cost-effective health care, and our community health centers are central to that effort,” said U.S. Senator Jack Reed.

“Community health centers provide access to affordable, high-quality health and dental care for tens of thousands of Rhode Islanders, and play an important role in our health care system nationwide. By providing preventive and primary care services in under-served communities, health centers help cut down on the number of hospital visits and trips to the emergency room, and that reduces costs in our health care system overall,” said Senator Sheldon Whitehouse, a member of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee. “I’m proud to have fought for funding for our network of health centers, and I’m honored to receive this award.”

“I am honored to be recognized as a Distinguished Community Health Defender, and while it is the doctors, nurses and health care providers on the front lines who deserve the credit for keeping our state healthy, I am proud of the role I play in advocating for quality, affordable health care in our state and across the country,” said Congressman Jim Langevin. “As a longtime supporter of health care reform, I am encouraged by the leveling off of health care costs that we are seeing, and most importantly, expanded access nationwide to health care and preventative services. We are moving in the right direction, and I will continue to fight for a health care system that works for all Americans.”

“Rhode Island’s community health centers provide comprehensive, high-quality care for some our state’s most vulnerable populations. It is critical that Congress continue to support community health centers so they can continue to provide preventive and primary medical, dental, and behavioral health care services that reduce costs and generate billions in savings for our national health care system,” said Congressman David Cicilline. “I am honored to be recognized as a Distinguished Community Health Advocate and to join the Rhode Island Health Center Association in celebrating National Health Center Week 2015.”

Providence Mayor Jorge Elorza attended the celebration and noted the importance of community health centers. “Community health centers are critical to the health and well-being of Providence and its residents,” said Mayor Jorge Elorza. “Providing care for one in four Providence residents, it is important that we do all that we can to support and promote these health centers so that they may continue to provide quality care for all.”

In Rhode Island in 2014 the community health centers provided primary medical, dental and behavioral health care for over 151,000 patients. Together, Rhode Island’s nine community health centers, which include eight federally qualified health centers and one island-based health center, form the largest network of primary care providers in the state. Evidence shows patients choose health centers because they are convenient, affordable, and offer a range of services from a team of caring professionals. All of the Rhode Island community health centers use electronic health records, and all are recognized as advanced patient centered medical homes.

One of the bright spots in America’s healthcare system, community health centers started 50 years ago as a pilot project during President Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty. Today, they have compiled a significant record of success that includes:

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- Reducing income and ethnic health disparities nationwide, even in the poorest and most challenged communities
- Reducing infant mortality rates
- Producing \$24 billion in annual health system savings
- Reducing unnecessary hospitalizations and unnecessary visits to the emergency room
- Maintaining patient satisfaction levels of nearly 100 percent

About the Rhode Island Health Center Association

Rhode Island's nine community health centers, including eight federally qualified health centers and one island-based health center, served over 151,000 Rhode Islanders in 2014 at over 30 office locations throughout the state. In addition, the Providence Center, and community mental health organization, is an associate member of RIHCA. The community health centers have a long history of providing high-quality, low-cost primary health care to Rhode Islanders. The community health centers are non-profit, safety-net primary care providers that serve patient populations who otherwise confront financial, geographic, language and cultural barriers accessing health care services. They provide care for Rhode Islanders who are uninsured, underinsured, privately insured and publicly insured.