

The U.S. Capitol may be hundreds of miles away but readers should understand the actions our leaders take have a direct and immediate impact on our community.

A case in point is an endangered health care program that already delivers results for the American taxpayer: Community Health Centers. Last year Neighborhood Health Clinics provided services to 8,607 medical patients and another 8,384 dental patients; 6,720 of our patients were children. Health centers like us don't just save lives, we also lower health care costs, create jobs, and reduce hospital visits so that fewer dollars are spent on "sick care." But unless Congress acts by the end of this month to extend funding, the consequences for us and other health centers and our patients will be drastic.

The program would be reduced by approximately 70%. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) itself has projected that the impact would be dramatic: closure of 2,800 health center locations, elimination of more than 50,000 jobs, and a loss of access to care for more than 9 million patients. Locally, it would result in Neighborhood Health Clinics seeing 3,242 fewer patients. Keep in mind this is a program that has been in place for more than 50 years and enjoys broad bipartisan support in Congress. Right now more than 75 national organizations, representing doctors, nurses, hospitals, health centers, children, patients, the faith community, financial institutions and health care industry partners, are banding together and calling on lawmakers to extend health center funding before September 30. Will you join us? Call the advocacy hotline, 1-866-456-3949, to reach your members of Congress.

Let's hope leaders pay attention and fix the funding cliff. Our health depends on it.

Signed,
Scott Jackson
Neighborhood Health Clinics Board Chair