



Multnomah County Community Health Council Citizen Budget Advisory Committee 2006

The Multnomah County Community Health Council serves as the Health Department's community advisory board and CBAC. It is also the federally-mandated governing body of Multnomah County's system of Community Health Centers. It is an appointed group, including members of the community with an interest in public health, representatives from local health and social service organizations, and most importantly, consumer members who utilize the Health Department's clinical services. The Council works closely with the Director and staff of the Health Department, meeting monthly throughout the year to provide community guidance on a wide variety of public health services, programs and policies affecting Multnomah County residents. One of our most important functions as a Council is to review and monitor Health Department's annual budget.

We believe that Multnomah County's most significant priority should be to ensure the health and well-being of all county residents. Adequately funding to sustain the County's current clinical health system is critical in order to do this. The County's primary care clinics are the front line in supporting our most vulnerable neighbors. As the income gap continues to grow, exacerbating health disparities, our County health clinics become an even more indispensable resource for the community at large.

The Health Department continues to face the daunting task of finding solutions to serve the County's growing under/uninsured population in the face of shrinking revenues. Significant budget constraints could result in distressing losses in clinical capacity, infrastructure, and medication support to our community partners. We suggest that Board decisions take into the account of following considerations:

- We do not want to see the Health Department risk its "federally qualified health center" (FQHC) status and its ability to obtain federal dollars. Federal funding requires that county health centers keep a certain level of care within the clinic system. To qualify for federal funding, health centers must maintain (1) a system of care that ensures access to primary and preventive services, and facilitates access to comprehensive health and social services, (2) quality services responsive to the needs and culture of the target community and/or populations, and (3) effective clinical and administrative leadership and procedures to guide the provision of services and quality improvement programs. The Multnomah Health Department is not currently in danger of losing federal primary care grants, but as the budget cuts deepen, we are concerned about the direction the Department will be forced to take and the impact on our FQHC status. Cutting sites and provider teams will result in lost Medicaid revenue. It is important to understand that cutting provider teams, without cutting building and operating costs, typically results in more revenue lost than costs saved.
- We worry about the community-wide consequences of having to turn newly uninsured clients away, continuing to take care of our patients who have lost their insurance, and cutting services that prevent worsening health conditions. These conditions will need to be treated in a more expensive way later. The community stands to lose more financially when increasing numbers of residents have no chance of accessing health care and end up using emergency room service as their only option.

- We are hearing directly from patients that Medicare Part D is creating a great deal of confusion. It is without question that the changes to the Medicare program are being felt locally. We urge you to keep in mind those who are in danger of losing adequate health insurance, and the reality that many in need are already invisible. Our clinical system should have the ability and financial resources to respond to these rapidly changing needs.
- We strongly advocate against any cutting into the “meat” of clinics. If we do this, we will be shutting out our most vulnerable citizens, many of whom are not able to speak for themselves, and increasing morbidity and mortality rates throughout the county.

In the Council’s opinion, it is critical for the Board of County Commissioners to understand that the needs and challenges of our local citizens are not going away anytime soon. With under/uninsured population increasing and available financial resources decreasing, the Health Department’s fiscal burden can only become heavier. We ask the County to keep pressure on the state to uphold its responsibility to find funding solutions. We urge you to advocate as you can with E-Board for systemic changes of the state’s health care system. Multnomah County simply cannot continue serving its residents without adequate funding and support from both the state and federal government.

From the Council’s perspective, the Department has been a responsible manager of its financial and human resources. Our Council serves as a voice of the community, representing many individuals who directly benefit from the exceptional services currently in place. At our monthly meetings, we hear directly from clients who are continually impressed with the compassion of the health care providers, the technological advances such as Electronic Medical Records at the clinics, and the Department’s commitment to cultural competence. It is our hope that you will continue to focus on the needs of our community’s most vulnerable residents.

Submitted on February 27, 2006 by the Multnomah County Community Health Council

Members of the Multnomah County Community Health Council

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