

2017 Legislative Priorities

- **Protect the health care safety net**
 - **Expand loan repayment assistance**
 - **Invest in oral health capacity**
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Washington State is a leader in expanding coverage for low-income populations. The community health center (CHC) system has worked hard to implement coverage expansion by expanding access, increasing capacity, and assisting individuals to enroll in and maintain health coverage. Since the expansion of Medicaid, CHCs are now seeing almost 134,000 more patients – people who now have a health care home. The number of CHC patients enrolled in Medicaid increased from 43.5 percent to 59.4 percent – dropping the number CHC patients without coverage from 34.2 percent to 18.5 percent! To move forward with these gains, our focus is to protect the health care safety net and make strategic investments in key areas to address health care gaps.

Protect the Health Care Safety Net. The uncertain future of health care reform and state budget constraints are putting pressure on the health care safety net. Health care savings from Medicaid expansion helped the state restore Medicaid dental coverage for adult enrollees, and invest in and preserve other essential services. The state must continue to fund a health care safety net that includes important Medicaid coverage such as dental care and pharmacy benefits. CHCs are committed to protecting these gains for our patients and communities.

Expand Loan Repayment Assistance. To increase access to care, it is essential for CHCs and other safety net health care delivery systems to encourage providers to work in rural and underserved areas. Loan repayment assistance works and provides immediate results! The Legislature should invest \$9 million to help build on the program's success. This investment will also help accommodate the inclusion of mental health providers to the loan repayment program, which will better facilitate behavioral health integration. These providers include licensed clinical social workers, licensed marriage and family therapists, licensed mental health counselors and psychologists.

Increase Oral Health Capacity. The Legislature should invest \$16.9 million in capital expenditures for CHCs to build dental clinics. The restoration of Medicaid preventive and restorative dental coverage to low-income adults has significantly increased dental access. This, however, is not enough! While CHCs have been working on expanding access—increasing dental services by 55 percent in 2015, there is more to be done. The CHCs have shovel-ready projects, many with community funding partners ready to ensure their success. They need, however, the Legislature's support to move forward.