

# 2017 State Policy Priorities

**1. Accept Federal Funds to Increase Access to Health Care Coverage:** The highest priority of Maine's Community Health Centers (CHCs) is passing legislation that would allow Maine to accept federal funds to increase access to health care coverage through Medicaid (MaineCare), allowing approximately 70,000 individuals to gain access. Thousands of these Mainers are patients at our CHCs, however, they are uninsured and as such, we receive little to no reimbursement to cover the cost for their care. Passing this critical legislation will create greater access to health care services for those in need, and strengthen both our health centers and the state's economy.

**2. Maintain and Build Upon Maine's Commitment to Support Community Health Centers Through Direct State Investment and Adequate Reimbursement:** Until 2016, Maine was the only state in the Northeast and in the minority of states across the country, in which no direct state funding was invested in the CHCs. While the latest annual appropriation of \$500,000 by the Legislature is an important first step, it is insufficient to meet the increased demand on services. Maine's CHCs operate on narrow margins, while at the same time producing some of the best quality outcomes in the country. Furthermore, they effectively work to keep costs down through their comprehensive and integrated approach to providing primary care. Maine must maintain and build upon the modest state investment for the CHCs, as well as ensure adequate reimbursement through the federally-required Prospective Payment System rates which will enable them to continue providing access to critical services for our most rural and underserved communities.

**3. Continue to Support Legislation that Increases Access to Alcohol and Substance Use Disorder Recovery and Support Services:** Mainers who struggle with an alcohol or substance use disorder need ready access to treatment, recovery and support services that are affordable, including a full range of behavioral health services. However, currently there are not enough access points to serve this population due to many factors, chief among them is insufficient funding to cover the costs of such care. In order for this crisis to be addressed adequately, Maine needs to make significant investments in these services, as well as enact legislation that aligns with the recommendations of the Maine Opiate Collaborative.

**4. Dental Public Policy Issues - Create a Preventive Dental Benefit Under MaineCare for all Adults:**

*A. Maine's CHCs provide millions of dollars each year in uncompensated dental care to adults throughout the state for their preventive and restorative needs. This results in cost savings from avoidable visits to the Emergency Department for oral health diseases and other conditions. However, there is currently no preventive and restorative MaineCare benefit (reimbursement) in place for adults (including pregnant women) to offset the rising burden that these costs are having on health center operations. Maine needs to create an adult dental benefit to increase access to affordable oral health services for adults and their children.*

# State Policy Priorities, Cont.

*B. Restore the Dental State Income Tax Credit Program to Help with Recruitment and Retainment of Dentists to Rural and Underserved Areas.* Maine's CHCs struggle to attract and retain dentists in rural and underserved areas due to a number of factors. Chief among them is the fact that other states, including those in New England, offer incentives such as state-funded loan repayment programs to make them more competitive. The Dental State Income Tax Credit Program has a proven track record of success in supporting the recruitment of dentists to some of Maine's most rural communities, including Fort Kent, Eastport and Lincoln. However, unless the Legislature restores the program, CHCs will have one less tool to attract these talented oral health providers to their practices to serve their patients.

**5. Continue to Address Maine's Primary Care Provider Recruitment Issues by Maintaining Budget Support for the Primary Care Professionals Tax Credit Program:** Maine's CHCs struggle to attract and retain primary care professionals, such as physicians, nurse practitioners, and physician's assistants, because of flaws in the National Health Service Corps' methodology, and because neighboring states have benefits such as state-funded loan repayment programs to make them more competitive. The Maine Legislature passed a law creating the primary care professionals tax credit program to help address this issue. In order for Maine to compete with other states in the region and across the country, funding must be appropriated in the state budget to sustain the program. If it is not, our CHCs will continue to have providers decline job offers in favor of positions in other states where these benefits are guaranteed.

**6. Immunization Policy:** We support evidence-based policies that result in improved immunization rates for children and adults. This may include (but is not limited to) assessing school entry requirements, policies for non-medical exemptions, or the dedication of resources to provide vaccines to vulnerable and underserved populations.

**7. Policies that Promote Access to Telehealth Services, Including Adequate Reimbursement:** For many residents of Maine, transportation is a barrier to accessing affordable, high quality health care services. The difficulty in recruiting and retaining medical, behavioral health and dental providers adds to this problem. Community Health Centers are poised to expand access to telehealth services, but will only be able to do so with adequate reimbursement to help cover the costs of providing that care. This is a cost-effective way to allow patients to access services closer to home and increase provider productivity across CHC sites.