

**Louisiana Primary Care Association, Inc.**  
503 Colonial Drive  
Post Office Box 966  
Baton Rouge, LA 70821-0966



For more information, contact:

**Ryan Sinitiere**  
Marketing & Communications Project Manager  
(225) 927-7662, ext. 210  
rsinitiere@lpca.net

LETTER TO THE EDITOR  
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## **Congressional Inaction Threatens Louisiana's Community Health Centers**

The healthcare debate in America is a contentious one. Republicans and Democrats in Congress have, so far, been unable to resolve their differences on a host of issues including the Affordable Care Act, the role of Medicaid, and the rising cost of healthcare.

Fortunately, the value of the Health Centers Program is one of the few things that members on both sides of the aisle can agree on. Our nation's Federally Qualified Health Centers (more commonly known as Community Health Centers) provide exceptional primary care, dental, and behavioral health services to patients at an affordable cost to the American taxpayer. Study after study concludes that by keeping patients out of the emergency room and emphasizing the importance of preventive care, Community Health Centers successfully save the American healthcare system hundreds of millions of dollars per year.

Across Louisiana, 34 organizations operate over 240 individual Community Health Center sites. These facilities are on the front lines in ensuring that Louisianans get accessible, affordable healthcare services regardless of their insurance status or ability to pay. In 2016 alone, these facilities provided care to nearly 385,000 patients through one million individual visits.

So, why then, does Congress continue to delay the re-authorization of funding for the Health Centers Program? Having passed the October 1 deadline, Health Centers across the country are now faced with a 70% cut in Federal funding. In Louisiana, this translates into a \$62 million loss – money that is needed to pay staff, purchase equipment, and simply keep the lights on so that patients can continue receiving the services they depend on.

Lawmakers in both the House and Senate have introduced bipartisan legislation (the CHIME Act) to extend funding for Health Centers and other important programs. We humbly urge Louisiana's Congressional delegation to support these efforts and ensure that our state's most vulnerable populations are afforded access to healthcare. Even with a very busy legislative calendar, Congress must understand that the health and wellbeing of ALL Americans is of the utmost importance.

**Gerrelda Davis**  
Executive Director  
Louisiana Primary Care Association