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Louisiana Ranks First in Health Center Patient Growth Rate

As Community Health Centers across the country saw a surge in patients from 2010-2016, Louisiana experienced the highest Community Health Center patient growth rate in the nation.

From 2010-2016, Community Health Centers across Louisiana saw an 86% increase in patient growth. As detailed in a [new report](#) published by the Geiger Gibson/RCHN Community Health Foundation Research Collaborative, data shows that Louisiana gained nearly 178,000 new Community Health Center patients, ranking the state first in the nation in patient growth rate.

The report titled: “Changes in Health Center Patients Served, 2010-2016” relied on information from the Uniform Data System, a data repository that tracks patient numbers, demographics, services provided, and other important indicators from Community Health Centers nationwide. These data show that over a six-year time span, health centers nationwide experienced a one-third (33%) patient growth. Within this overall figure, state-by-state growth varied significantly in terms of both overall percentage growth rates and the number of patients served.

Louisiana’s surge in Community Health Center patients can be attributed to a number of factors, including: the Affordable Care Act and Governor Edwards’ decision to expand Medicaid, the growth and expansion of health center facilities across the state, and the enormous patient need that exists in underserved and rural communities. Louisiana currently has 36 Community Health Center organizations who collectively operate over 250 individual healthcare facilities. They work to provide comprehensive healthcare - including: primary care, dental, and behavioral health services to 385,000 patients annually, regardless of their ability to pay.

“This report confirms what we already know: Louisiana’s Community Health Centers play a critical role in the health of Louisiana’s citizens,” said Gerelda Davis, Executive Director of the Louisiana Primary Care Association. “This surge in patients is a direct result of the high quality, affordable care that health centers are known for providing. Growth at this level would not be possible without the passionate, hard-working men and women across our state who staff these facilities.”

Federally Qualified Health Centers (commonly known as Community Health Centers) are community-based health care providers that receive funds from the HRSA Health Center Program to provide primary care services in underserved areas. They must meet a stringent set of requirements, including providing care on a sliding fee scale based on ability to pay and operating under a governing board that includes patients. As they stress the importance of preventive care and focus on keeping patients out of the emergency room, health centers have been shown to save the healthcare system millions of dollars. In fact, in 2016 alone, Louisiana’s Community Health Centers had a \$567 million total economic impact on the state, with \$436 million savings to Medicaid.

Health centers serve 13.4% of Louisiana’s Medicaid population while accounting for only 0.8% of the state’s overall Medicaid expenses.

“Investing in the expansion of Community Health Centers will generate cost-savings,” said Dan Hawkins, Senior Vice President for Policy and Research at the National Association of Community Health Centers (NACHC).

“Independent research has repeatedly documented the link between the expansion of health center capacity and reduced visits to hospital emergency rooms. When people have access to affordable care at a health center, they use it, stay healthy and avoid costlier ‘sick care’ at a hospital.”

While Louisiana consistently ranks last in a variety of health indicators, Community Health Centers are key to improving those rankings and raising health outcomes. Since 2016, over a dozen new sites have been added across Louisiana. There is at least one Community Health Center location in 53 of Louisiana’s 64 parishes.

“This report illustrates the success we have seen in our state. This is a monumental concerted effort to ensure that thousands of Louisianans have access to high quality and affordable health care in all corners of the state,” said Dr. Shondra Williams, Board President of the Louisiana Primary Care Association and CEO of Jefferson Community Health Care Centers. “For every resident that’s linked to a system of care, the cost of care can be reduced with a direct relationship to primary and preventable health care thus reducing the cost of unnecessary emergency room visits, reducing infant mortality and morbidity, and reducing the cost of long term care.”

About the Louisiana Primary Care Association

The Louisiana Primary Care Association (LPCA) represents 36 federally funded, private, non-profit and public Community Health Centers across Louisiana that serve nearly 385,000 patients annually. LPCA promotes community-based health services through advocacy, education, and collaboration with community partners. Our goal is to ensure that every Louisianan has access to affordable, quality, primary care services. For more information, visit www.LPCA.net.

About the Geiger Gibson/RCHN Community Health Foundation Research Collaborative

The Geiger Gibson/RCHN Community Health Foundation Research Collaborative is a unique, comprehensive, multi-faceted academic and research initiative focused on community health centers. The Collaborative’s academic home is the Department of Health Policy and Management at Milken Institute School of Public Health at the George Washington University. For more information, visit www.rchnfoundation.org.

[Find a full copy of the report here.](#)

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