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CHDI faces potential fiscal cliff

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Community Health Development Inc. in Uvalde is one of 1,300 health centers around the country in danger of having to sharply curtail services – or close – if the U.S. Congress does not extend federal funding due to expire in October.

According to a letter sent by community health center officials to congressional leaders, these centers care for more than 22 million patients, including nearly 7 million children and 268,000 veterans.

At the end of fiscal year 2015, several dedicated funding streams supporting the operations of community health centers are in danger of ending.

Centers across the nation have come together and are urging constituents to contact their state and federal government repre-

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We can’t operate that way.’

Rachel Gonzales-Hanson
Chief executive officer, CHDI

sentatives, telling them to act immediately to avert what they said is a potentially disastrous disruption within the health care system.

PLEASE SEE LOSS, PAGE 22

LOSS: 'We need to... communicate with our elected officials'

FROM PAGE 1

"We really are under the gun," said Rachael Gonzales-Hanson, CHDI's chief executive officer, of the looming primary care cliff. She was speaking to Uvalde County Commissioners last Monday.

"We need to try and communicate with our elected officials, both at the state and the federal level, that we need to save the health centers from the cut that is looming.

"If they don't make a decision by Oct. 1, then we will experience a 70 percent cut in our grant," Gonzales-Hanson said. "To us, that equates to almost 40 percent of our total budget. We can't operate that way."

She is asking elected officials and community members to contact their representatives at the state and federal level and ask for support of all community health clinics.

"We have had some great responses from both sides

of the aisle, and we are really appreciative of that," Gonzales-Hanson said.

The primary care cliff will be an agenda item during Uvalde County Day, recognized on Feb. 25.

Uvalde County Judge Bill Mitchell said for Uvalde County Day, planners have concerns broken down into four categories. One of those categories is health care.

"This is the major topic with health care that we need to push with our state representatives," Mitchell said.

LOCAL BREAKDOWN

In Uvalde, Gonzales-Hanson said that a 40 percent budget cut means CHDI would have to shut down satellite clinics in



Bill Mitchell

Leakey and Camp Wood.

"That's it, those would be gone," she said.

She said there are 10 people

employed in those two towns including two mid-level providers who would

lose their jobs.

She said the dental department in Uvalde is self-sustaining and will be able to stay open.

"We may have to cut back one dentist, and given that we just got them fully staffed that would hurt because we are just getting caught up on the backlog of patients."

As far as Our Health/Nuestro de Salud is concerned, Gonzales-Hanson doesn't see how it would stay open.

"Even with cutbacks, we can't sustain everything that's there... and all the patients we are seeing."

She noted that in 2013, they treated 12,000 patients. Seventy percent of those patients are uninsured and do not earn enough income to get an Affordable Care Act plan through the Health Insurance Exchange.

While most of the money the clinic uses to operate comes from patient revenue, these grants make it possible to provide care based on income.

"It's pretty devastating," she said in conclusion.

SPECIFICS

Concerns have been voiced in a letter signed by leaders of hundreds of community health centers and sent to the leaders of the U.S. House of Representatives and U.S. Senate.

In that letter, center representatives asked for immediate action, "...To

avert a potentially disastrous disruption within our health care system."

The scheduled expiration would affect not only operating budgets and grants, but also scholarships and loan repayments through National Health Service Corps (NHSC) and primary care training in Teaching Health Centers (THCs).

The NHSC provides scholarships and loan repayment to primary care practitioners – physicians, nurses, physician assistants, oral health and behavioral health professionals – who make a multi-year commitment to service in underserved communities. The letter states that in 2012, NHSC placed more than 10,000 providers in places suffering from health care shortages.

THCs are community-based primary care training programs committed to preparing health professionals to serve the health needs of underserved communities. The letter states that programs in 24 states support more than 550 medical residents through this program. Physicians trained in health centers are more than three times as likely to work in a health center and more than twice as likely to work in an underserved area as those not trained at health centers.

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