

Save Our Health Centers

By Suze Hargraves

Sometimes it's hard to see that, when it comes to budgets, numbers represent people. Yes, it's true that numbers don't lie, but they don't give you the whole picture either. They can't tell you the names, the faces, the families and the stories behind them. They can't, no matter how accurate they are, give a complete picture. Numbers can't speak to you of how they decimate lives and futures with the stroke of a pen. I can.

Here in New Hampshire it's budget season. It's like moose season except the guns are much bigger. Right now factions at the state level are hunting our community health centers. The Governor is proposing \$2 million in cuts to primary care contracts for two years or \$4 million. That number represents a 42% reduction to the community health center's of New Hampshire General Fund appropriations. To make matters worse, the House of Representatives is suggesting bigger cuts for statewide community safety nets (our health centers). Those numbers are difficult enough to digest but they become poison when you apply them to the people they will effect.

Community Health Centers serve the underinsured and uninsured in our communities. Underinsured means a person may have insurance but it does not cover the services needed or that deductibles are so high that workers are left effectively uninsured. I could quote a bunch of numbers, but that's not what I do. I'm not a numbers person. I see people. I see families, friends and neighbors who are just making it and depend on our health centers for medical care. If you need numbers, locally that translates to 3,500 people who visit White Mountain Community Health Center 14,000 times in a year. Without our health centers, these people would have to either go without care or accumulate bills they can't possibly pay. I have to ask, what's the long term cost of that scenario?

Let's make you one of those people for a minute: Imagine, if you will, that you find out that you're one of the millions of Americans with diabetes and you've been laid off. What now? Left untreated diabetes will kill you. Test strips cost an average of \$30 for 60 strips. If you test twice a day, that's a month's worth. Now tack on the cost of medical visits to monitor your blood sugar. Add on the cost of medicines and don't forget the cost of the medicines to control all the complications and associated conditions that go with diabetes. Getting pretty expensive? Where's the money for all of that going to come from? If you decide you're going to just "let it go" what is the cost of that? Hospitalizations are not cheap. What about the long term affect on your families financial picture? Your family loses not only a loved one, but also your income. This cost thing just keeps tumbling on doesn't it?

Cutting health centers funding doesn't make sense. It doesn't make sense in the short term and it surely doesn't make sense in the long term. Health centers help those who need it most in our communities, our state and our country. Short sighted cuts to the healthcare of the uninsured and underinsured are a surefire way to raise the cost of healthcare and lower our quality of life in the long run. Untreated chronic illness, spread of disease and lack of basic preventative care are problems the citizens of the United States, the State of New Hampshire and Mount Washington Valley simply don't deserve.

Maybe you agree with me. Maybe you don't. Either way, I ask that you see people, not numbers when you vote. On paper it's all dollars and cents, but in real life its real people, men, women and children, who are being cut out of the healthcare picture.

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