

SARASOTA COUNTY GOVERNMENT

Administration

TO: Thomas A. Harmer, County Administrator
FROM: Lee Ann Lowery, Assistant County Administrator
DATE: April 7, 2015
SUBJECT: **Item 2B: Sarasota County's Primary Care Partnership**

Background

Sarasota County Government partners with our Federally-Qualified Health Center (FQHC) to provide primary health care at three clinics:

1. Community Health Center of North Port;
2. William L. Little Health & Human Services Center (Sarasota); and
3. Sally and Sam Shapiro Babies & Children Medical Center, a new children's clinic which opened in 2014 (Sarasota).

As required by the Affordable Care Act, our FQHC is a partnership between a government agency, the Sarasota County Health Department (SCHD) and a nonprofit agency, the Community Health Center of North Port, Inc. (CHCNP). The Sarasota County Health Department is the medical services provider; the Board of the CHCNP is the nonprofit which provides the community oversight. This partnership applied for and received its designation as an FQHC in 2008.

Together, Sarasota County and our FQHC partners, FDOH-Sarasota and CHCNP, have built a very successful program providing primary care to the uninsured and underinsured in Sarasota County. With the Sarasota County Health Department as the medical provider, our FQHC is able to accept the most vulnerable, the most at-risk patients, those which many medical providers cannot consider taking on.

In fact, 30,500 citizens, including 13,700 children, have been cared for by Sarasota County's FQHC. Services go beyond traditional primary care and include dental, behavioral health, pharmacy and lab work. There are even counselors available to help those without insurance qualify for Medicaid, Medicare or other insurance in the affordable insurance marketplace.

The funding model that makes this achievement possible provides \$17 million in revenues from three main sources:

1. \$1.3M from Sarasota County;
2. \$1.9M from the federal Affordable Care Act which expires April 2016; and
3. Payments from third-party insurers, primarily Medicaid and Medicare.

The State only contributes \$98,000—which is funding required to be spent on primary care.

The State Department of Health

The State Department of Health (DOH), Surgeon General's Office, has directed that those health departments which provide primary care are not to renew their federal Affordable Care Act grants (our application will be due this fall). Furthermore, the DOH has dictated that all health departments plan to cease providing primary care. These directives leave few choices for Sarasota County's successful primary care system.

DOH insists that private nonprofits like Rural Manatee Health or Family Health Centers of Southwest Florida can provide these services. However, should Sarasota County seek to have one of these entities agree to provide primary care services, they are under no obligation to take all of our 30,500 cases. These providers are not likely to assume the cases of those high-risk patients we currently serve; some of those patients are sent by these providers to Sarasota County's FQHC. Those patients who rely solely on Medicare and Medicaid for their health insurance are finding it increasingly difficult to locate doctors who will accept their cases due to the low reimbursement rates. Private providers face the same challenge and, as a result, often cap the number of Medicaid and Medicare patients they will serve. In addition, private providers do not have to be open or responsive to the needs of the County or its citizens in the way that our health department and county government are.

Our Efforts

Sarasota County has put forward a strong, concerted effort to retain its successful primary care model. This is primarily a political issue since there is little that can be done by our legislative delegation to directly influence the State Department of Health. That said, the following steps have been taken to educate the State on the success of our program and the dire consequences of disrupting and closing it.

- Individual meetings and briefings by Rob Lewis, Sarasota County's Director of Community and Intergovernmental Relations, with each member of the county legislative delegation. These meetings included information fact sheet and March 8 Herald Tribune Editorial.
- March 4 Sarasota County Chair Mason's letter on behalf of the BCC to the Surgeon General, State Department of Health.
- March 10 Charlotte County Commission letter to DOH.
- March 17 FAC Legislative Day; Commissioner Hines, County Administrator Tom Harmer, and Rob Lewis met with county delegation members for briefings on several issues including FQHC.
- March 18 Follow up letter from Chair Mason on behalf of the BCC to Rep. Boyd.
- March 23 Longboat Key Mayor letter to Surgeon General, State Department of Health.
- March 23 Copies of newspaper articles to legislative delegation.
- March 31 Letter from Chair Mason on behalf of the BCC hand delivered to Governor's Office (attached).
- Contract lobbyists meetings with Governor's staff, DOH staff, and legislators / staff.

Attachments

1. March 31, 2015 Letter from Chair Mason to Governor Rick Scott