

Little Hoover Commission Sees Clinics as Part of the Solution to Health Care Reform (7.9.2007)

“Clinics represent an immense current asset for the state” says the Little Hoover Commission in their May 24th report, “*A Smart Way to Care: Transforming Medi-Cal for the Future*”. The Commission report highlights the great potential for clinics to become even more valuable and encourages the state to invest in their promising approach as the debate on health care reform continues. The Commission surmises that to truly start the process of reforming California’s health care system the state will have to greatly modify the Medi-Cal system.

Though several of the current health care reform proposals do involve Medi-Cal, the Commission feels an entire transformation is needed. Without addressing the fundamental weaknesses of the current program, adding more people to Medi-Cal will only strain an already burdened system. The Commission asserts that the governor needs to articulate a vision for that transformation and that the Department of Health Care Services needs to develop a strategic plan to reengineer the Medi-Cal program so to better ensure that its health spending improves health outcomes.

Clinics Could Serve As Model – State Should Invest Further in Clinics

The Commission believes that many of the challenges that exist in transforming California’s current Medi-Cal system in the midst of health care reform are already being addressed by community clinics and health centers.

The long term solution to reducing the number of people who develop serious health problems and disabilities caused by disease requires expanding access to primary care and ensuring a medical home. The Commission lauded community health centers and managed care plans for their ability to successfully provide primary and preventative care, and suggested that the state help clinics to further develop their capacity to deliver and manage patients with chronic diseases, which will better assist clinics in serving Medi-Cal enrollees in the most cost effective setting, as well as reducing unnecessary non-urgent visits to hospital emergency rooms. Currently, only half of Medi-Cal beneficiaries are in managed care. To improve access to primary care that is the foundation of prevention, the Commission asserts the state must bolster the network of community health centers and provide incentives for communities to try new approaches to primary care.

The Commission’s report continuously emphasizes clinics and their capacity to maximize access, provide prevention and chronic disease management in a culturally and linguistically sensitive approach. The Commission considers community clinics and health centers a system in which the state and its leaders can model as they forward their individual health reform proposals, and adamantly encourages the expansion and support of this crucial component of California’s safety net.

For the full report please visit: <http://lhc.ca.gov/lhcdir/187/Report187.pdf>