

What is a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC)?

In 1965, the Johnson Administration funded the first eight neighborhood health centers to eradicate poverty by improving the country's overall social and economic condition. By 2001 there were 748 health centers at 4,128 sites around the nation, serving an estimated 10 million individuals (Florida currently has 37 Federally Qualified Health Centers {FQHCs}). FQHCs receive federal grants from the Bureau for Primary Health Care through section 330 of the Public Health Service Act. FQHCs provide primary care (medical, dental and behavioral health) services in medically underserved areas and are required to: serve everyone, without regard to ability to pay; operate on a sliding fee scale; accept all types of insurance; be located in a medically underserved area. FQHCs are community-based organizations, where the community participates in the direction of services and other decisions related to clinic operations.

Why does Hernando County need an FQHC?

The Hernando County Community Health Needs Assessments published in December 2001 and June 2006, identified zip code areas 34601 and 34614 as medically underserved areas. Current demographic, socio-economic and public health statistics for these target areas validate the need for a FQHC in Hernando County. The shortage of primary care physicians, dentists and mental health providers; the high percentage of individuals living below 200 percent of the of Federal Poverty Level (FPL); and the fact that approximately 20% of residents are uninsured underscore the unique healthcare characteristics of these areas. Residents within these target areas have a higher incidence of low birth weight babies and a higher death rate for cardiovascular disease, cancer, respiratory disease and perinatal conditions.

What are the benefits of having an FQHC in Hernando County?

Prior to becoming an FQHC, the majority of primary care services in the county for the uninsured were provided to those that are 120% below poverty, leaving a large gap of residents without primary care services. With FQHC qualification and a systematic referral system, the Health Department can provide comprehensive health services to this previously underserved population. Other benefits include:

- **Reduced cost prescription and non-prescription medications**—FQHC qualification will allow community members to purchase prescription and non-prescription medications at reduced cost through the 340B Drug Pricing Program.
- **Reduce infant mortality** – FQHC clients have fewer low birth weight babies due to emphasis on early entry into prenatal care and the provision of Healthy Start wraparound services.
- **Increased preventive services** –FQHC clients are more likely to receive counseling on diet, physical activity, smoking, drinking, drug use, and sexually transmitted diseases than the uninsured patients who seek care elsewhere. FQHCs also increase the use of pap smears and mammograms in the communities they serve.
- **Increased cost effectiveness of healthcare** - FQHC patients have lower hospital admission rates, shorter lengths of hospital stays, less unnecessary use of hospital emergency rooms, and cost 30 percent below other providers serving the same population.

Why is the Hernando County Health Department the “best fit” for our FQHC?

The FQHC has implicit advantages by working through the Health Department. By teaming with an already successful Health Department operation, the FQHC:

- Builds on an existing primary care base
- Benefits from an existing, experienced administration and staff
- Is ready to begin operation immediately upon funding approval
- Is located within the geographical target area that is on the bus route, making it readily accessible to area residents
- Continues to provide and expand preventive health services (i.e diabetes management classes, smoking cessation classes)

“Sustainability is very likely as federal funding will be channeled through the preexisting organization of the Health Department.”

*Elizabeth Callaghan, MS, LD, Chief Executive Officer
Kelli Maw, MD, MPH, Chief Medical Officer*