

Advocates say proposed cuts to health centers would eliminate access for many in West Michigan

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By Kyla King | The Grand Rapids Press

Leaders at **Cherry Street Health Services** in Grand Rapids say **proposed federal spending cuts** could result in a loss of access to health care services for 34,800 West Michigan residents who otherwise would have been served.

In addition, as many as 111,000 people would be affected in some way.

And, the cuts could also result in a loss of 59 jobs, including AmeriCorps members and other staff, said Cherry Street Executive Director Chris Shea.

Cherry Street Health Services is the largest community health center in Kent County with 12 clinics in the area.

The agency's most recent project, **Heart of the City Health Center**, is currently under construction at the corner of Cherry and LaGrave in downtown Grand Rapids. The new 79,300 square foot building project **will open its doors** in September.

Shea said the cuts would have a "devastating impact."

"Our clinics would be impacted tremendously, not only by the loss of funding, but also by the elimination of the AmeriCorps program," he said.

Shea said the funding is jeopardy because the U.S. House Appropriations Committee has announced it will send a bill to the House floor that includes \$1.3 billion in cuts to Community Health Center funding for the remainder of fiscal year 2011. Included in the \$1.3 billion in cuts is the elimination of the **AmeriCorps** program.

The annual appropriation for the Health Centers Program is currently \$2.19 billion, meaning this cut represents a 60 percent reduction in funding, he said.



Grand Rapids Press File Photo

Jawaan Gill, with daughter DeontiAsia 4, keeps an eye her son Romeco Earvin, 1, as medical assistant Sammy Torrez listens to his chest after giving him an immunization shot at the Cherry Street Clinic.

A vote by the full House is expected this week.

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