



FUNDING SOUGHT FOR HEALTH CENTERS IN DETROIT, WAYNE COUNTY

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Detroit and Wayne County leaders hope to convince federal authorities to give them \$20 million over the next five years to build at least 10 more community health centers.

Their case: Despite some of the nation's highest poverty and unemployment rates, Detroit and Wayne County have only 24 federally funded community health centers -- clinics that receive enhanced reimbursement to provide care on a sliding scale to uninsured and underinsured people.

Doctors, clinic leaders and public health officials made a plea to the Health **Resources** and Services Administration last week, asking them to give more weight to factors like poverty, unemployment and the lack of primary care providers for the next round of grants expected later this year.

The HRSA declined to address whether it would place more emphasis on areas with high poverty and jobless rates, but said in a statement to the Free Press that it is committed to a **process** "that is fair and transparent, giving all communities the opportunity to make their case for funding."

The Detroit and Wayne group is concerned that the area will be hit hard by a new federal mandate starting in 2014 to require most Americans to have insurance.

That provision, and expansions of state-run Medicaid programs, will create "a tsunami" that could trigger longer waits for care, said Dr. Herbert Smitherman, assistant dean of urban and community health at the Wayne State University School of Medicine, who made the presentation to federal officials.

Detroit received \$7.98 million in 2006 to build and operate its clinics, ranking 19th among large cities, according to the HRSA, which administers the community health clinic program.

If poverty alone were a factor, Detroit and Wayne County would get much more money, as they rank among areas with the highest number of poor people in the nation.

Other factors, including the degree of collaboration among centers in a region and the quality of the **application** weigh more in the decision, metro-area health leaders say.

Detroit didn't do enough in the past to help community groups apply for the **funds**, said Chris Allen, CEO of the Detroit Wayne County Health Authority. Some years none applied, in part because several large hospital systems had their own clinics, which have since closed.

The health authority is holding workshops this month to recruit applicants for the grants.

In a statement to the Free Press, U.S. Rep. John Dingell, D-Mich., a congressional health reform leader, said the improved coordination of local resources "will make it much easier for the Michigan delegation to make the case for this **funding** -- and there will be a big push to get this funding for our state."

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