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## New initiative marks 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of community health centers

*Nationwide effort aims to celebrate, educate and mobilize*

The Community Health Center Alumni Association, an organization that marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of community health centers, officially launches today with the unveiling of a website that allows members to join the organization. Community health centers, which started with two locations in 1965, have grown to more than 9,000 locations serving 28 million patients annually in all 50 states.

The centers provide primary health care in all parts of the country and are a key component of meeting the nation's health-care needs.

**The Community Health Center Alumni Association (CHCAA)** is a nonprofit organization for current and former providers, staff, patients, donors, vendors, volunteers, interns and elected officials – anyone who has had a relationship with community health centers.

“Health care leaders were inspired by the history of community health centers to create an alumni association to remind us of our success while we work to ensure the future of health centers,” said **Brian Toomey**, chairman of the CHCAA's Board of Directors. The board's other members are from Mississippi, Massachusetts, Texas and the District of Columbia.

The CHCAA officially launched its website ([www.chcalumni.org](http://www.chcalumni.org)) today, March 20. The web site, combined with various activities planned for around the country, will help connect and re-connect alumni, inform and educate the public and mobilize supporters to ensure the centers' future.

The CHCAA's launch comes as the National Association of Community Health Centers conducts its annual Policy and Issues Forum in Washington, D.C. The association released a report earlier this week focusing on health centers' record of accomplishment during the past five decades and challenges that lie ahead. The report estimates that 7.4 million patients would lose access to care at their local health

center and nearly 57,000 clinicians and staff would be laid off unless Congress acts to reauthorize the Health Centers Fund. (The report was released March 17 and found at [www.nachc.com](http://www.nachc.com).)

The CHCAA's efforts will continue throughout 2015 and beyond, said Toomey, who is also CEO of Piedmont Health Services in Carrboro, N.C., which operates eight community health centers in central North Carolina.

"Our challenge and our purpose is to gather the time, talents and treasures of all who have crossed the portals of health centers in the past 50 years, and to see it forward to ensure the future of health care," Toomey added. "Community health center alumni include CEOs of multibillion dollar health-care systems and multibillion dollar health insurance companies as well as teachers, professors, nurses, doctors, great grandparents and their great grandchildren."

Among the other benefits of community health centers, Toomey said, were:

- The centers provide preventative care and help patients avoid costly hospital care. They generate \$24 billion in annual savings to the health-care system – for taxpayers and local, state and federal governments.
- They provide care without regard to a patient's ability to pay; they fill a critical gap in the nation's health-care system. These centers provide one quarter of all primary care visits for the nation's low-income population.
- The centers use the most advanced medical practices. In sum, they offer high-quality medical care at an affordable price. They play a key role in health-care reform.
- They offer all the care of private medical offices (including dental care, pharmaceutical services, nutrition counseling and other services) under one roof. This comprehensive approach is particularly important for elderly patients – medical staff can make sure they have filled prescriptions and are continuing to fill them, monitor drug intake, etc.
- The centers need government subsidies to remain affordable. However government support accounts for only a small portion of CHC operating costs. The Office of Management and Budget has consistently rated CHCs among the most effective uses of tax dollars.

"Community health centers traditionally have received bipartisan support from elected officials, including the full-fledged support of the five living and former presidents," Toomey said.

*For more information on the Community Health Centers Alumni Association, please visit [www.chcalumni.org](http://www.chcalumni.org) or contact [info@chcalumni.org](mailto:info@chcalumni.org).*