



Nurse-Managed Health Centers In Pennsylvania

Improving the health of vulnerable communities

WHAT ARE NURSE-MANAGED HEALTH CENTERS?

Nurse-Managed Health Centers are health centers led by advanced practice nurses (including Certified Registered Nurse Practitioners). They provide a variety of primary care, health promotion, and disease prevention services to those who are underserved and least likely to receive ongoing health care services. This population includes a high percentage of clients who are living in poverty, uninsured, and/or members of racial/ethnic minority groups.

Nurse-managed primary care centers offer a broad scope of services and can serve as designated primary care providers for patients. In these centers, primary care services may include treatment for acute and chronic illness, routine physical exams, immunizations for adults and children, disease screenings, diagnostic tests, pre-natal care, dental care, drug and alcohol treatment, vision/hearing screenings, and other services.

Nurse-managed wellness centers serve as crucial entry points into the primary care system. In these centers, nurses provide health screenings, vaccinations, direct nursing care for minor acute problems, health education, and counseling services, all with the goal of improving patients' quality of life.

Currently, there are 33 Nurse-Managed Health Centers and health programs in Pennsylvania that record over 200,000 patient encounters annually, making Pennsylvania the national leader in nurse-managed health care. Philadelphia currently has the most Nurse-Managed Health Centers in Pennsylvania. Nurse-Managed Health Centers can also be found in Allegheny, Bucks, Chester, Dauphin, Delaware, Greene, Lancaster, Montgomery, Northumberland, Monroe, and York counties.

NURSE-MANAGED HEALTH CENTERS AND NURSING EDUCATION

In addition to providing services directly to clients, Nurse-Managed Health Centers also play an important role in nursing education. Most Nurse-Managed Health Centers are affiliated with academic schools of nursing and serve as clinical education and practice sites for nursing students and faculty.

Nurse-managed health centers are affiliated with nursing education programs at: Bloomsburg University, Community College of Philadelphia, Duquesne University, East Stroudsburg University, Gwynedd-Mercy College, Holy Family University, La Salle University, Messiah College, Millersville University, Neumann College, Pennsylvania State University, Temple University, University of Pennsylvania, and York College of Pennsylvania.

Patients of primary care nurse practitioners have comparable outcomes to those of primary care physicians.

— M. Munding, *JAMA*, 2000.

Nurse practitioners can manage 80-90% of the care provided by primary care physicians without referral or consultation.

— M. Munding, *New England Journal of Medicine*, 1994.

Nurse-managed health center patients experience higher rates of generic medication fills and lower hospitalization rates than patients of similar providers.

— T. Hansen-Turton, *Nursing Clinics of North America*, 2005.

Elderly and disabled people with access to nurse-managed health centers visit emergency rooms less often than those without access.

— D. Glick, *Family & Community Health*, 1999.

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CHALLENGES FACING NURSE-MANAGED HEALTH CENTERS

Although Nurse-Managed Health Centers address some of the most pressing issues in public health, they face unique challenges and barriers to sustainability.

- **Academic Nurse-Managed Health Centers Cannot Access Traditional Community Health Center Funding.**

The fact that many Nurse-Managed Health Centers are affiliated with schools of nursing often prevents them from qualifying for funding through the Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) program. Most academic Nurse-Managed Health Centers are legally controlled by the Board of Trustees of the school with which they are affiliated. Because of this, academic Nurse-Managed Health Centers cannot ensure that 51% of the health center's board of directors are community members, as required by the U.S. Bureau of Primary Health Care. Even though academic Nurse-Managed Health Centers often have community advisory boards, this is not enough to allow them to qualify for enhanced funding and reimbursement under the FQHC program.

- **Nurse-Managed Health Centers Address Emerging Needs That Have Not Yet Been Officially Recognized by the Government.**

A number of Nurse-Managed Health Centers in Pennsylvania serve pockets of poverty that do not technically fall within a designated medically underserved area or health professions shortage area that would make them eligible for FQHC status. For example, Nurse-Managed Health Centers in the generally affluent counties that make up the Philadelphia suburbs do not qualify for federal health center funding because they are not located in health professions shortage areas (HPSA), and they do not serve federally-recognized medically underserved areas (MUA) or populations (MUP). However, these centers, which are located in communities such as Kennett Square, Lansdale and Glenside, serve a broad population of uninsured and underinsured families, and their services are crucial to the health of low-income people who live and work in predominantly high-income communities.

- **Insurer Policies Prevent Nurse Practitioners From Acting as Primary Care Providers.**

Even though nurse practitioners are legally authorized and qualified to act as primary care providers in the state of Pennsylvania, managed care organizations have enacted policies which prevent nurse practitioners from performing this function. While this situation appears to be improving slowly, Nurse-Managed Health Centers in Pennsylvania continue to face credentialing and reimbursement challenges – even among HealthChoices insurers. Without adequate reimbursement from managed care organizations, Nurse-Managed Health Centers experience financial instability.

**Find out more about Nurse-Managed Health Centers
and the National Nursing Centers Consortium
by visiting our website at www.nncc.us**