

**Testimony before the Senate  
Public Health and Welfare Committee  
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**Clark Center Auditorium  
Crozer-Chester Medical Center  
Upland, Pennsylvania**

**April 15, 2008**

Good morning, Chairman Erickson and members of the Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee. My name is Steve Fera, and I am Vice President of Government and Social Mission Programs at Independence Blue Cross. Thank you for giving our company the opportunity to participate in this important discussion about Pennsylvania's health clinics and providing care for low income and uninsured residents.

I am thankful for the opportunity to discuss the importance of Pennsylvania health clinics and our partnership with clinics in our region through the **IBC Charitable Medical Care Grant Program**, a hallmark program of Independence Blue Cross' social mission.

In late 2003, Independence Blue Cross launched the Charitable Medical Care Grant Program to provide financial and programmatic support to non-profit, privately funded health clinics in southeastern Pennsylvania that offer free or nominal-fee care to the area's uninsured.

Two years later, Independence Blue Cross expanded the Charitable Medical Care Grant Program to a total commitment of \$14 million through 2010 to date. IBC supports 31 local community health center clinics and has committed an overall total of \$12.9 million, in financial support through 2010 throughout the five-county region in southeastern Pennsylvania.

**The program works with the clinics by:**

- Providing financial help to clinics for general operating expenses, enabling clinics to sustain or increase operating capacity, add or expand ancillary services (dental, social work, mental health, and pharmacy programs); develop or enhance preventative health and community outreach programs; and even ensure as in one case that they have heat and running water.

- Funding special projects that address specific community health disparities – e.g., asthma safety, health care for migrant farm workers, childhood obesity, transportation barriers to accessing health care, work wellness, and youth outreach.
- Partnering with 26 area-nursing schools through the **IBC Nurse Scholars Program** to establish a clinic internship program to expose students to the challenges and rewards of public health and caring for underserved populations.
- IBC organizes and hosts an annual Best Practices Conference to provide a forum for area clinics to network and engage national experts on topics such as effective fundraising strategies, volunteer recruitment, site expansion, optimizing prescription-drug support for the uninsured, best legal practices, and hospital and provider partnerships. About 150 guests attend, including government officials and legislators. Previous guest speakers included the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, PhRMA, AcademyHealth, and the PA Governor’s Office of Health Care Reform. This year’s event is scheduled to coincide with National Uninsured Week and will focus on the problem of the uninsured from both the national and state levels and will feature presenters from the National Association of Community Health Centers and the Kaiser Commission on Medicaid and the Uninsured

The clinics that we support utilize different operating models. Nurse practitioners with the support of physicians on staff manage many clinics; others are volunteer-based and rely entirely on the physicians, nurses, and other health care professionals who generously devote their time, while others support a broader mission of a non-profit, such as the Covenant House Pennsylvania who provides primary care services for at-risk youth. Though their practice models are diverse, these clinics share a common purpose and perform incredible work with limited resources at a time when demand for help is growing in ways they never imagined.

### **What is the impact of the grant?**

The partnership between IBC and the clinics benefits the community in a number of ways. First and foremost, our collaborative efforts continue to improve the quality and accessibility of health care services in medically underserved communities.

- In the last year, the 31 IBC-supported community health clinics served 91,000 unduplicated patients and provided 297,000 visits, helping many uninsured and underinsured patients who would otherwise turn to emergency rooms or simply go without medical care altogether.
- Many clinics now offer additional services such as dental, social work, behavioral health and pharmacy programs, and several have relocated to larger facilities or opened satellite locations to accommodate the growing number of patients who rely on the clinic services.
- **The program also eases the burden of the uninsured on the region's health care system by reducing rates of avoidable ER utilization and** the number of uninsured who require treatment for serious and costly health problems that could have been avoided with basic preventive care.
- Ultimately, the program will reduce the cost of uncompensated health care and help slow the escalation in overall health care costs in the Philadelphia region.

The IBC Charitable Medical Care Grant Program enables us to partner with incredible professionals who provide a significant commitment to the community, along with partnering with regional entities such as Philadelphia Health Management Corporation (PHMC). Last week, you heard testimony from the National Nursing Centers Consortium and The Free Clinic of Doylestown and today you have heard from Michael Lucas, Executive Director of ChesPenn Health Services, all of whom have different unique delivery clinic models. These are clinics that we are proud to support and partner with through our vibrant Social Mission that has been and always will be a key part of our culture.

Independence Blue Cross remains committed to the health of the community through our Social Mission – an effort that sets us apart from other insurers - in which we focus on building the health and wellbeing of southeastern Pennsylvania. In addition to the Charitable Medical Care Grant Program, we are dedicated to our efforts to increasing enrollment of eligible Pennsylvania residents in programs that support low-income children and adults such as CHIP, Special Care, and adultBasic. We will continue to collaborate with all stakeholders to develop innovative approaches and progressive solutions to improve access to quality and affordable health care for the most vulnerable members of our community.

Thank you again for inviting IBC's participation in this hearing. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.