



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
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M. JODI RELL
GOVERNOR

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Governor Rell Announces \$800,000 in Federal Funding To Help Avoid Unnecessary Emergency Room Visits

*Grant Will Link Network of 'Federally-Qualified Health Centers' with Hospitals
To Arrange Routine Care Outside of Emergency Room for Medicaid Enrollees*

Governor M. Jodi Rell today announced that Connecticut is receiving a federal grant of nearly \$800,000 to promote the use of community-based health centers by patients who now go to hospital emergency rooms for routine medical needs, clogging the urgent-care system and driving up costs.

The grant will help connect the state's network of 13 federally-qualified health centers with hospitals through a computerized appointment system for Medicaid beneficiaries. The goal is to relieve emergency room overcrowding while cutting the price-tag of taxpayer-funded health care. More than 217,000 Connecticut residents accessed community health centers last year.

"This grant is especially timely as we continue to look for effective ways to get the most value from our health care dollars," Governor Rell said. "Health care -- Medicaid in particular-- is by far the largest part of the state budget. Unnecessary trips to the hospital emergency room are extremely costly and entirely preventable. The initiative to be funded by this new grant represents a major step forward to relieve hospitals of routine medical care, cut Medicaid costs, and provide for quality health care for residents in community settings."

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services awarded \$793,558 over two years to the state Department of Social Services to utilize a web-based application connecting providers in federally-qualified health centers and hospitals in designated communities. The system will search and schedule appointments for Medicaid enrollees, encouraging people to obtain routine medical care at community-based health centers.

Social Services Commissioner Michael P. Starkowski praised the initiative as an "innovative measure to continue building on the tremendous potential of federally-qualified health centers to serve additional Connecticut residents with high-quality health care in modern facilities close to home."

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“Despite the waiting times and episodic nature of hospital emergency departments, it is often selected by patients because it is a convenient alternative to overcoming the perceived barriers to accessing primary care,” said Evelyn Barnum, chief executive officer of the Community Health Center Association of Connecticut. “Many hospital emergency rooms face overcrowding and are seeking ways to establish primary care medical homes for non-emergent patients.”

The new program will connect providers in 13 federally-qualified health centers and 10 hospitals, to be designated, through a common web-based platform to search and schedule appointments for non-emergency patients. The web-based application, *My Health Direct*, was created by Global Health Direct, Inc. The Community Health Center Association of Connecticut, the membership association for federally-qualified health centers, will lead the project under contract with the Department of Social Services.

The *My Health Direct* system will enable patients to be scheduled for appointments 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Each referred patient leaves the emergency department with a written confirmation of his or her primary care appointment in hand. Patient confirmations are printed in the patient’s language of choice, and contain the day and time of the appointment, along with the name, address, and telephone number of the clinic. The confirmation specifies the bus lines that operate near the community health center. The confirmation contains all of the information that the patient needs in relation to the appointment, and increases the likelihood that they will attend their appointment.

Use of *My Health Direct* will reduce the repeated utilization of hospital emergency departments by non-emergency Medicaid patients and thereby reduce cost to the Medicaid program, a federal/state health coverage program for low-income residents. Uninsured patients will also benefit from referrals to federally-qualified health centers in their community, which provide a full range of medical, dental and mental health services to patients, regardless of their ability to pay. It will also allow hospital emergency departments to allocate a greater share of their resources to patients with emergency conditions. Patients will be engaged in the selection of their primary care “medical home” to ensure that it meets their immediate and ongoing needs.

Created by the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 (DRA), the federal grants will help Medicaid programs fund local and rural initiatives to provide alternative health care settings for individuals with non-emergency medical needs.



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The DRA provided \$50 million to be distributed over four years (2006-2009) for primary health care programs, primarily in rural and/or other underserved areas as well as programs that work closely with community hospitals. This week's award of \$37.5 million by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services includes the first three years of the initiative and will fund 29 programs in these 20 states. The remaining \$12.5 million will be available to those grantees in 2009. Besides Connecticut, states receiving grant funds under this program are Colorado, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Maryland, Michigan, Missouri, New Jersey, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Tennessee, Utah and Washington.

Earlier this week, Governor M. Jodi Rell released a report detailing how \$25.8 million in state funding she announced in September 2006 has expanded health services for more than 217,000 uninsured and underinsured Connecticut residents.

The report outlines the efforts to extend patient services for more than 217,000 patients by Connecticut's federally-qualified health centers. Community health care centers are expanding their hours to include evenings and weekends, while services are being increased to provide non-emergency transportation, cancer screening, tobacco cessation programs, primary care case management and prenatal care.

"This report demonstrates how a concerted effort by Connecticut's safety net providers and state leaders can continue to assure affordable health care to the uninsured in this state," Governor Rell said. "With state assistance, our community health centers are increasing their levels of services, enhancing their facilities, purchasing state of the art medical equipment and recruiting top-notch physicians and medical personnel." More information at www.ct.gov/governorrell/cwp/view.asp?A=3293&Q=413176.

The Governor's midterm budget recommendation for next fiscal year also includes \$100,000 for the Department of Social Services to conduct outreach to Medicaid and HUSKY clients to use appropriate primary care providers, rather than turn to hospital emergency departments for primary medical care.

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