

Ohio Association of Free Clinics



What is the Ohio Association of Free Clinics?

The Ohio Association of Free Clinics (OAFc) was founded in November 2000. The mission of the OAFc is to advocate for high quality health services by mobilizing resources, strengthening member clinics and acting as a powerful voice for underserved Ohioans. Forty one (41) free clinics across the state currently belong to the OAFc, and membership continues to grow.

Why Free Clinics?

The free clinic movement began in the late 1960's to address the needs of the working poor and uninsured. A Families USA analysis of Census data found that 2.8 million Ohioans under the age of 65 went without health insurance during 2002 and 2003. More recently, in 2009, the Ohio Family Health Survey released data stating that the percentage of Ohioans who are uninsured rose from 15% to 17%. Nearly one in five Ohioans are uninsured, that's 1.2 million people. The erosion of employer-based health coverage and the loss of manufacturing jobs, among other factors, have influenced this trend. Nationally, according to the Center for Studying Health System Change, more than 20% of the U.S. population reported not getting needed medical care or delaying care in the previous 12 months in 2007. This means that more than 23 million people went without medical care and approximately 36 million delayed care last year.

Using cost-effective strategies, such as in-kind services and donations of health care resources and time, free clinics provide for the health care needs of their patients until they have access to health insurance. These strategies mean that every dollar invested in free clinics brings nearly \$6.75 in care for patients. Free clinics provide access to care for many who find themselves temporarily unemployed or unable to obtain employer-based health insurance. They also allow many adults to acquire and maintain employment, as well as keep their children in school. By utilizing over 6,000 volunteers, in addition to paid staff, OAFc member clinics provided care for more than 54,000 uninsured or underinsured Ohioans in 2008. In total, Ohio's free clinics provided over \$67 million in health care to their patients in 2008. Above all, the free clinics strive to provide the best care possible, while maintaining dignity and respect, to those who need it most.

How do Free Clinics Operate?

Free clinics offer health care services to people who have few, if any, other options. Free clinics have developed networks of dedicated, talented medical professionals who volunteer their time to serve those who are unable to attain and maintain quality, affordable health care. Services vary, but may include: primary care, prescription assistance, dental, vision, behavioral health and other specialties. Last year 228,700 prescriptions were filled through patient assistance programs, and purchased or donated medications.

Free clinics do not claim to be the answer to the health care crisis. While systemic change is necessary, people who are sick and living in poverty today cannot wait until this change occurs. Without free clinics, people who are uninsured and unable to afford health care will most likely go to hospital emergency rooms, the most costly form of care. The end result is higher health care costs for everyone.

How are Free Clinics Funded?

Each clinic is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization and can be funded by local foundations, state and local government, generous individuals, faith communities, the United Way, hospitals, civic groups, and other corporate donors.

Need More Information?

Go to www.ohiofreeclinics.org or contact Laura Pridgeon, OAFc Interim Executive Director
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