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In This Issue ...

Guest editorial	2	Sports schedules	5
Front page news	2	Phunque's Desk	5
Board member	2	Parks 50th anniversary	6
Neighborhood register	2	Legal notices	7
School lunches	3	Edible plants	7
Cat Tales	4	Obituary	7
Care and Share	4	Junior Turman	
Education event	4	A little help	8
Weather	4	Extension notes	8
Farmers market	4		

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Guest Editorial

For the past 49 years, Colorado's Community Health Centers – such as Dove Creek Community Health Clinic, have provided a backbone of health services across our state.

With a commitment to prevention and quality, Colorado CHCs are the health care home for one in eight Coloradans. But a projected 70 percent cut in federal grant funding, a loss of at least $50 million to Colorado Community Health Centers, threatens to undermine the gains made by health centers in past years. Unless lawmakers act, this cut will come in less than fourteen months.

We urge Congress to make Community Health Center funding a priority in the next budget cycle and continue investing in the Community Health Center program and therefore in the health of our communities.

The Colorado Community Health Center movement began in the early-1960's when the first independent, community owned, public health clinics emerged in Colorado to care for their neighbors. All along the way, Community Health Centers have been locally run and fiscally responsible. Clinics like ours cost less and produce better results ("outcomes" in medical parlance), than do doctors in private practice.

Three years ago, Colorado's CHCs received additional federal funding to expand. CHCs expanded clinic sites and added providers for tens of thousands of people who would get health insurance. As Colorado's Medicaid enrollment has surged past one million, health centers (like ours) have become critical to providing services across our state. Many doctors in private practice are not able to accept new patients, much less patients on Medicaid, which pays less than private insurers. We also still see plenty of uninsured people.

For instance, at Dove Creek Community Health Clinic, our doors are open 9:00 to 5:00 weekdays, opening an hour earlier on Tuesday, with a range of services that include primary care, dental, mental health and case management. We also stay open late to help busy working families. Yet even with extra hours, our clinics are often full.

Federal grant funding makes up about 20 percent of Colorado Community Health Centers' revenue. But unless Congress acts, the majority of federal grant funding for Dove Creek Community Health Clinic - and all Colorado CHCs will halt in October 2015. That will limit our ability to see patients, reducing the number of people we serve, and potentially leading to staff cuts and facility closures.

Where will those patients go? How will they get health care?

Health insurance is only valuable if you can use it. Colorado CHCs provide access to care for hundreds of thousands of Coloradans. We hope Congress will reauthorize critical funds to let us keep up the good work.

Dianne Smith
Executive Director
Dove Creek Community Health Clinic
dchaed@centurytel.net
970-677-2291