

# Starting Your Journey: A Guide to Health Centers



## What is a Health Center?

Health Centers that are part of the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) Health Center Program are nonprofit, community-based, and patient-directed organizations that provide **affordable, accessible, and high-quality** primary health care to medically underserved and uninsured populations, including people experiencing homelessness, agricultural workers, residents of public housing, and veterans.

## Health Centers:

- Deliver comprehensive **primary health care**, including medical, dental, vision, and behavioral health services.
- Offer **supportive services** that promote access to health care such as translation, transportation, and housing assistance.
- Are governed by a **community board** composed of a majority of health center patients who represent the population served.
- Provide **cost-effective care** with fees adjusted based on an individual's ability to pay.
- Are often referred to as **Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs)**.

## Types Include:

- Community Health Centers (CHCs)
- Health Care for the Homeless Centers (HCHs)
- Look-Alikes (LALs)
- Migrant Health Centers (MHCs)
- Public Housing Primary Care Centers (PHPCs)
- School-Based Health Centers (SBHCs)

*For a more detailed introduction, visit the [CHAMPS About Health Centers](#) webpage.*

**Working at a health center** is a **unique experience** with an **abundance of advantages**, including Mission-Driven Environments, a Commitment to High Quality Care, and Potential Scholarship and/or Loan Repayment Options.

## Key Events in the History of the Health Center Movement

1962

### The Migrant Health Act is Passed

This legislation allocated funds, facilitated inter-agency cooperation, disseminated information, and provided health services to migrant farmworkers, highlighting the importance of community-based care.

1965

### The First "Neighborhood Health Centers" are Funded

Dr. Count D. Gibson, Jr. and Dr. H. Jack Geiger pioneered the founding of the first two health centers in the nation, in Massachusetts and Mississippi.

1971

### NACHC is Established

The National Association of Neighborhood Health Centers (later to become the National Association of Community Health Centers [NACHC]) was created to provide education, training, and technical assistance.

1985

### State & Regional Primary Care Associations (PCAs) are Federally Funded

Existing PCAs received their first federal funding and recognition, which strengthened their ability to represent and assist health centers, foster collaboration, and advance health center initiatives.

2001

### Health Center Growth & Expansion

During President George W. Bush's administration, the Health Center Expansion Initiative added over 1,200 new sites and expanded the types of services provided by health centers.

2010

### The Affordable Care Act (ACA) is Passed

The ACA provided \$11 billion in funding to health centers, enabling them to serve twice as many patients.

TODAY

### Continued Success

The movement initiated by the nation's first health centers continues to deliver affordable, high-quality care to millions of people in frontier, rural, and urban communities across America.

*Learn more about the history of the Health Center Movement in the [CHroniCles timeline](#).*

*For an in-depth look at one of the first health centers, watch "[Out in the Rural](#)."*

*Explore the [Impact of the Health Center Program](#).*

**YOU ARE PART OF A LARGER MOVEMENT!**

*Learn more about how health centers are supported on the backside of this flyer.*

# Organizations that Support Health Centers

There are a wide variety of organizations across the nation that support the success of health centers.



## Community Level

### Community Partners

#### Health Center Partners Include:

- Community Colleges
- Food Banks
- Health Departments
- Technical Schools
- Transportation Departments
- Workforce Centers
- ... And More!



## State Level

### State Primary Care Associations (SPCAs)

Each state is represented by a BPHC-funded, nonprofit organization known as a State Primary Care Association (SPCA).

State PCAs work with the health centers in their state(s) to address the healthcare needs of the patients and communities served.

#### PCAs receive funding to provide Training and Technical Assistance (T/TA) to health centers to help them:

- Increase access to primary care
- Advance clinical quality and performance
- Foster a strong and resilient workforce
- Enhance emergency preparedness and response

## Regional Level

### Regional Primary Care Associations (RPCAs)

Each state is organized within one of 10 larger HHS regions. Currently, two BPHC-funded Regional PCAs exist to represent Region 8 (VIII) and Region 10 (X).

The two Regional PCAs offer a range of programs and services to support and strengthen health centers located in the Northwest and Mountain and Plains states.

#### Community Health Association of Mountain/Plains States (CHAMPS)

Serves Region VIII - CO, MT, ND, SD, UT, WY

#### Northwest Regional Primary Care Association (NWRPCA)

Serves Region X - AK, ID, OR, WA



RPCAs and SPCAs maintain strong, collaborative partnerships to effectively deliver a comprehensive range of services to health centers located within their geographic areas. Similarly, Health Center Controlled Networks (HCCNs) work with health centers and PCAs to improve quality of care and patient safety by using health information technology (HIT) to reduce costs and improve care coordination.

## National Level

### Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA)

An agency of the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) that funds programs for equitable health care to people who are geographically isolated and economically or medically vulnerable.

### Bureau of Primary Health Care (BPHC)

A HRSA Bureau that funds health centers, which provide affordable, accessible, and high-quality primary health care to underserved communities at thousands of sites.

### Bureau of Health Workforce (BHW)

A HRSA Bureau that works closely with BPHC and health centers to strengthen the health workforce by connecting providers to underserved areas with scholarships, loan repayment, and grants.

National Training and Technical Assistance Partners (NTTAPs) are BPHC-funded organizations that provide training and technical assistance to help health centers serve diverse populations and focus on financial stability, workforce development, culturally appropriate care, and more.



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