



**Testimony of Matthew A. Weissman, MD
Chief Medical Officer and acting President and CEO
Presented by Elizabeth Howell, VP of Development and Public Relations
Community Healthcare Network**

**Hearing before the New York City Council Committee on Health
“New York City and the Affordable Care Act: Where are we post roll-out and
how can we boost access to care.”
New York City Hall Chambers
Thursday, October 23, 2014**

My name is Elizabeth Howell, VP of Public Relations, and I am here representing Community Healthcare Network and our Chief Medical Officer and acting president and CEO, Dr. Matthew A. Weissman. CHN has been in existence for over 30 years. Today we operate a network of 12 Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHC) in the boroughs of the Bronx, Manhattan, Queens and Brooklyn. In addition we are a lead Health Home in Brooklyn and Queens and a co-lead in the Bronx and Manhattan. We provide comprehensive services including primary care, behavioral health and social services to over 80,000 individuals per year. We are Joint Commission Accredited, recognized by NCQA as a Level 3 Patient Centered Medical Home and are also recognized by NCQA for excellence in diabetes care.

Nearly 1 million New Yorkers inclusive of over nearly 500,000 New York City residents were newly enrolled in Medicaid and Qualified Health Plans during the initial open enrollment period of the Affordable Care Act from 10/1/13 – 4/15/14. CHN was actively engaged in educating the communities we serve regarding the availability of these plans, providing application assistance and facilitating enrollment. There were many challenges faced during this initial open enrollment due to lack of training, however we educated thousands of NYC citizens and assisted in the application process for nearly 1,000 individuals. I believe we are well prepared for the next open enrollment which begins on November 15, 2014 through the training of additional staff at all of our health centers. We have actively been educating our communities since the close of the initial open enrollment period and successfully trained staff across the four boroughs. However, we are concerned that 89% of uninsured American ages 18-64 do not realize open enrollment begins on November 15th according to a recent report of the Kaiser Family Foundation and many do not know the repercussions of not enrolling. I believe the city should take an active position on educating our citizens about the open enrollment period through a public service announcement campaign.

Second to the enrollment hurdle is the concern that there is insufficient access to primary care. I would argue that many existing FQHC's, such as CHN have capacity to provide primary care to more New Yorkers, however these existing FQHC's are not readily accessible to all. There are large pockets of the city also known as "health care deserts" which do not have convenient, qualified safety-net providers.

The need to continue to invest in primary care cannot be overstated. Numerous studies show that primary care:

- lowers health care costs;
- increases access to appropriate medical services;
- reduces the rate of preventable hospital admission and unnecessary emergency room care;
- reduces disparities in health care and health outcomes; and
- improves overall health status.

FQHC's are located in underserved communities and provide community-based, comprehensive primary care to anyone who needs care, regardless of ability to pay. We provide a vast range of services including primary and preventive care, behavioral health services, dental care as well as enabling services such as care coordination, nutrition counseling and health education.

The city's effort to support the strengthening of existing FQHC's infrastructure and identifying opportunities to open new health centers would provide an enormous benefit in reducing the lack of primary care. Last year, the Community Health Care Association of New York State (CHCANYS) published a comprehensive report on *A Plan for Expanding Sustainable Community Health Centers in New York*. The report called on a two-step process to support this goal. The first recommendation is to make an investment in expanding internal capacity of existing FQHC's. This would include addressing workforce needs, increasing productivity, improving operations and enhancing physical infrastructure of the health centers. The second recommendation is to expand physical capacity by opening new sites and deploying mobile medical vans. The CHCANYS report identified 16 neighborhoods in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan and Queens that are a top priority for expanded primary care. In closing, I believe that NYC government through the auspices of the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene can play a vital role in making these two goals a reality, therefore reducing the gap in the lack of primary care.