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Virginia Free Health Clinics See 11% Rise in Patients

Slow Economy Contributes to Increased Need for Services in Richmond

Richmond, VA: The Virginia Association of Free Clinics reported a sharp 11% increase in the annual number of state residents seeking healthcare services from member clinics. The free clinics now serve 80,254 patients on an annual basis, compared with 72,191 in fiscal year 2010. The total number of patient visits for 2011 was 388,786.

The Association also dispensed a record 771,000 pharmaceutical prescriptions last year with a retail value exceeding \$77 million. Additionally, the clinics are seeing growing needs in the areas of dental care and mental health services.

“The tremendous growth in free clinic services reflects continuing weakness in the overall economy coupled with rising health care costs,” said Cathy Lewis, Chairman of the Association. “A large number of our clinics have long waiting lists because they cannot meet the rising demand with the existing resources.”

Free clinics are the most cost-effective provider of health care services in Virginia because they use large numbers of volunteer doctors and nurses. Access Now, an innovative model delivering specialty services to free clinic patients in the Richmond area, has approximately 900 physician volunteers. Each year since the program began in 2008, patient enrollment has increased by as much as 40 percent.

“It is clear that people need free clinics now more than ever,” said Nicki Peet, the Acting Executive Director of the Association. “Free clinics care for Virginians who would be forced to seek care in an expensive emergency room setting or go without care.”

The Virginia Association of Free Clinics (VAFC) is the nation's oldest free clinic association, representing the Commonwealth's network of 61 free clinics. The Association is a private, nonprofit membership organization that provides training, technical, assistance, research, resource development and advocacy to free clinics throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia.

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