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N.C. General Assembly approves funding for free and charitable clinics to expand health care for state's uninsured individuals and families

Bipartisan budget item is important recognition of clinics' role in safety net for working poor

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. (November 19, 2021) – In a budget signed by Gov. Roy Cooper Nov. 18, the North Carolina General Assembly approved \$15 million to support the [North Carolina Association of Free & Charitable Clinics](#), whose 72 member medical, dental and pharmacy clinics serve as an important component of the safety net for the state's uninsured and underinsured.

The budget also includes nearly \$25 million more that likely will benefit the state's free and charitable clinics – including \$15 million for Community Health Grants and almost \$9.5 million in direct funding for individual member clinics. The budget bill also creates a joint legislative committee that will seek to find ways to increase access to health care – the fundamental mission of free and charitable clinics.

“We are grateful for the support from our legislators in both parties and from the Governor – who clearly recognize the value and critical services free and charitable clinics provide,” said Randy Jordan, CEO of the North Carolina Association of Free & Charitable Clinics. “The funding and the joint committee demonstrate a commitment to providing health care for the working poor and to doing so in innovative ways.”

Free and charitable clinics handled a surge in new patients during the pandemic as people lost jobs and health insurance. At the same time, they experienced a decline in volunteers and donations as people stayed home and fundraising events were hampered. Undeterred, free and charitable clinics played a key role in North Carolina's health care response to the pandemic, providing Covid-19 testing and treatment and administering more than 35,000 vaccines.

“Our clinics have done extraordinary work with staff placing themselves at risk and accepting a stream of new patients while also managing their existing clientele,” said Tony Price, the association's board chair and CEO of the [Moore Free & Charitable Clinic](#) in Southern Pines. “Free and charitable clinics have been around for decades but today are playing an increasingly important role in helping our most vulnerable populations. We look forward to continuing the conversation about how we can work together to expand access and equity in health care.”

The Association's [72 member clinics](#) deliver a full range of services to about 80,000 uninsured and underinsured people in 86 N.C. counties, in most cases at no cost to the patient.

Free and charitable clinics primarily serve patients who are working full time but don't have employer-sponsored health insurance, earn too much to qualify for Medicaid assistance, and yet don't make enough to qualify for subsidies under the Affordable Care Act. Many live with chronic diseases such as diabetes and hypertension, which can increase absenteeism and put them at greater risk to contract and die from infectious diseases such as COVID-19.

The North Carolina Association of Free & Charitable Clinics is based in Winston-Salem and provides funding, education and advocacy for its member clinics from the mountains to the beaches. The Association and its clinics are expanding access to health care, working to reduce health disparities, and focusing on social determinants of health to improve patients' lives.

About North Carolina Association of Free & Charitable Clinics

The North Carolina Association of Free & Charitable Clinics supports 72 member clinics in expanding access to health care, reducing health disparities and improving the health of uninsured and underinsured individuals. Member clinics are a vital part of North Carolina's safety net, providing care for 80,000 patients in 86 counties, including primary and specialty medical care; dental care; pharmacy services; optometry; behavioral health care; lab tests and hospital referrals. The association supports member clinics with education, advocacy, research, funding and collaboration, and promotes quality health care for all North Carolinians. Learn more at www.ncafcc.org.

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