



*Rhode Island's 10 Community Health Centers* provide high-quality, low-cost primary health care to our state's most vulnerable populations. Dental health is an integral part of overall health. Recognizing this, eight (soon to be nine) of our community health centers provide dental care to adults and children who have RIte Care, Medicaid, private insurance, and who are uninsured. Uninsured patients pay for services on a sliding-scale basis. Most of the health centers' dental patients are uninsured or publicly insured.

## Dental Offices at Community Health Centers

### Rhode Island's Community Health Centers are Leaders in Dental Care for Low-Income Rhode Islanders

In 2008, the health centers treated nearly 31,000 adults and children throughout Rhode Island with over 85,000 dental visits including oral examinations, emergency visits, and preventative services.<sup>1</sup> This is a dramatic increase from the capacity in 2003, when the health center dental population was fewer than 10,000 patients.

There are 69 dental operatories at the health centers. The dental offices employ about 50 dentists and hygienists, and additional support staff. Tri-Town Community Action Agency will add three additional operatories and dental staff when they complete renovations and begin offering dental services in Spring 2010.

Since 1998, community health centers have made a dental capital investment of over \$5.5 million.

### Economic impact of dental offices at CHCs

The dental offices at the community health centers are an important part of the Rhode Island economy. The dental offices employ over 125 Rhode Islanders from communities around the state. The dental offices use local laboratories and suppliers; one health center alone spends \$60,000 yearly for local dental laboratory services.



### High-quality dental care helps families

**Tina** and her children started going to the Thundermist dental center in Woonsocket years ago because it was the only dental office that would see the whole family with their public dental insurance which they qualify for through their RIte Care eligibility.

**Elaine and Roger** live with their two teenage children and are covered by RIte Care insurance. Their family was without a dentist for about one year when their dentist retired; it was difficult to find a dentist who takes the dental insurance they have through their RIte Care eligibility. The family then found CCAP, and now relies on the dental center in Cranston for regular dental care, fillings, and for Roger's dentures. Roger describes the dentist at CCAP as the best he has ever found.

***“The capacity of community health centers to offer dental services must be maintained and expanded.”<sup>2</sup>***

### *Partnering with Boston University Training the next generation of dentists*

One community health center, Blackstone Valley Community Health Care, is expanding access to dental care and training dentists at the same time. The health center is teaming up with the Boston University Goldman School of Dentistry. Students will come in groups of two for a 10 week rotation, and they will live in apartments at the health center.

### **Rhode Island’s Community Health Centers: an Integral Part of the Dental Safety Net**

The eight (soon to be nine) community health centers providing dental care form the core of Rhode Island’s dental safety net. Together with the health centers, Rhode Island Hospital, St. Joseph’s, and the dental hygiene clinic at CCRI are the only dental offices that provide a significant amount of care to Rhode Islanders with Medicaid and without insurance.



The Molar Express, a program of three health centers, delivers mobile dental services to children around Rhode Island.

### **Oral health is an important part of overall health,<sup>3</sup> and increases productivity**

There is an association between increased likelihood of pre-term labor and low-birth weight, and untreated periodontal disease.<sup>4</sup>

Untreated oral disease is associated with an exacerbation of chronic medical conditions such as diabetes, heart disease and stroke.<sup>4</sup>

The Surgeon General reported that 164 million work hours are lost each year due to oral health problems and on average there are 3.7 days per year of restricted activity among each 100 employed people.<sup>5</sup>

### **Rhode Island Community Health Centers**

- Blackstone Valley Community Health Care
- Block Island Health Services
- Comprehensive Community Action Program
- East Bay Community Action Program
- Well One (formerly Northwest Community Health Care)
- Providence Community Health Centers
- Thundermist Health Center
- Tri-Town Community Action Agency\*
- Wood River Health Services

\*Tri-Town will begin offering dental services in Spring 2010.

### **Citations**

- <sup>1</sup> Bureau of Primary Health Care, Uniform Data Systems, 2008.
- <sup>2</sup> Closing the Gap: Improving Access to Dental Care in Rhode Island. Report of the Rhode Island Oral Health Access Project, 2006.
- <sup>3</sup> US Department of Health and Human Services. *Oral Health in America: A Report of the Surgeon General-- Executive Summary*. Rockville, MD: US Department of Health and Human Services, National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research, National Institutes of Health, 2000.
- <sup>4</sup> “Medicaid Coverage of Adult Dental Services,” State Health Policy Monitor, October 2008.
- <sup>5</sup> Division of Oral Health, Oral Health for Adults (Washington, DC: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Dec. 2006).