



Health Center Association
OF NEBRASKA

2024

PROJECT ACCESS

IMPACT REPORT

Prepared by :

HEALTH CENTER ASSOCIATION OF NEBRASKA



Prepared By

The Health Center Association of Nebraska (HCAN) in collaboration with the Centene Foundation, Nebraska Total Care, UnitedHealthcare Community Plan of Nebraska, the Creighton Community Collaborative, and the Project Access Steering Committee.

About Us

Health Center Association of Nebraska (HCAN) is Nebraska's non-profit Primary Care Association, representing the state's seven Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), also known as community health centers. In 2024, Nebraska's health centers served over 123,000 Nebraskans, including 7,500 individuals experiencing homelessness, over 2,400 agricultural workers, and over 40,000 children. Nebraska's health centers provide care across 87 service locations, including mobile medical and dental services, school-based clinics, and services co-located with community partners like public health departments, homeless shelters, and public housing.

HCAN was established in 2011 and is funded primarily through a Cooperative Agreement with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA).

 info@hcanebbraska.org

Acknowledgements:



Project Access Overview

In February 2023, Project Access was launched to help Nebraska's community health centers address critical challenges in providing access to care across urban, rural, and frontier areas. The initiative focuses on increasing patient access by addressing provider shortages, improving clinic operations, expanding capacity, and enhancing the workforce pipeline. By strengthening healthcare services and infrastructure, Project Access aims to ensure more Nebraskans receive the care they need.

Funding for Project Access is made possible through the generous support of the Centene Foundation, Nebraska Total Care, UnitedHealthcare Community Plan of Nebraska, and the Creighton Community Collaborative. Their continued financial contributions reflect a shared commitment to improving healthcare access for all Nebraskans.

Project Access consists of the following four main components:

1. **Recruitment and Retention:** Support health centers with competitive compensation through sign-on bonuses, loan forgiveness, education, licensure, relocation aid, and innovative retention strategies.
2. **Clinical Optimization:** Fund initiatives to enhance patient access, like hiring consultants, upgrading technology, or improving scheduling to reduce no-shows and increase same-day/next-day appointments.
3. **Capital Improvements:** Expand access by adding physical capacity, growing telehealth, developing mobile programs, and advancing new projects to serve additional Nebraskans.
4. **Workforce Pipeline Development:** Collaborate with key stakeholders to address workforce shortages, attract talent to health centers, and expand Nebraska's health science graduate pool, focusing on health center-affiliated programs.

HCAN continues to serve as the day-to-day administrator of Project Access, with ongoing oversight from the Project Access Steering Committee. The purpose of the Committee is to govern the overall vision and direction of the program, set measurable goals, and review metrics over time. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the Committee to evaluate the effectiveness of the overall program and guide the sustainability of Project Access.

Project Access Impact

Since 2023, Nebraska community health centers have achieved significant milestones, including offering sign-on bonuses and loan repayment for medical providers and dentists, acquiring a mobile unit to extend their services and funding staff retention bonuses. Project Access funding allows health centers to offer competitive recruitment packages to attract new talent, which overall has had a significant impact on our workforce.

67

Total Staff Hired

67 new staff have been hired at all seven Nebraska health centers.

722

Staff Retention Bonuses

722 retention bonuses were given to health center staff to retain talent.

22

Loan Repayment Matches

Health centers were able to match loan repayments for 22 staff members.

15,065

Additional patients served

Through Project Access funds, newly hired providers led to an increase in patients served.



Access to Care Impact

- Charles Drew Health Center's new providers saw **2,388** patients.
- Community Action Health Center hired four new providers who saw **564** patients.
- Heartland Health Center reported **10,849** cumulative patient visits by providers receiving loan repayment and/or recruitment incentives.
- Midtown Health Center's new providers started at the end of 2024 and have already completed **404** encounters. Their dentist scheduled to start in 2025 is projected to complete **860** encounters annually.
- OneWorld Community Health Centers estimates that providers hired through Project Access have completed **30,000+** visits.

Recruitment and Retention

"Supervisors are empowered to give small gifts or expressions of gratitude to staff. This practice has not only significantly boosted employee morale but has also heightened supervisors' awareness of staff accomplishments and has prompted them to be more attentive to the needs and well-being of those they lead. As a result, the overall work environment has been greatly enhanced." -Terri Ford-Wolfgang, CEO, Good Neighbor Community Health Center

By the Numbers - Project Access Hires

5

Physicians

32

NPs/PAs

9

**Behavioral Health
Providers**

3

Midwives

10

**Dental Staff
(DDS/RDH)**

4

Nurses

Introducing HCAN's Recruitment Services Program

Through Project Access, HCAN launched a Recruitment Services Program dedicated to prioritizing the hiring needs of Nebraska community health centers. HCAN is thrilled to offer this new service, which came as a direct request from health center executive leadership struggling to fill open positions and pay the steep price tag associated with external recruitment firms. HCAN's new Talent Acquisition Specialist will begin direct recruiting for the Nebraska community health centers, engaging academic partners and graduating professionals on the availability of loan repayment, and developing a repository of job seekers to fill key positions with the health centers. HCAN is currently scheduling on-site visits for in-person introductions and health center tours.

Meet HCAN's Talent Acquisition Specialist, Becca Usher: This newly created position will address the critical need for healthcare professionals in underserved communities by managing recruitment efforts on behalf of participating health centers. Through targeted campaigns, strategic partnerships with educational institutions and community organizations, and personalized support, she will connect participating health centers with skilled primary care providers, dentists, behavioral health professionals, advanced practice providers, administrative staff, and executive leaders as requested by the health centers.



Pipeline Development

Today's healthcare professions students are future health center employees, so it is essential that the HCAN and health center teams do everything possible to ensure students are aware of health center career options. HCAN helps build a pipeline of future health center employees by attending hiring events, presenting in classrooms, and hosting interns. In 2024, the HCAN team attended a total of **17** hiring events, completed **12** presentations highlighting health center career opportunities, and hosted **2** interns.

Health Center Wins

- Charles Drew Health Center's team was able to attend **10** hiring events to attract new talent.
- Good Neighbor Community Health Center provided a stipend to one behavioral health student.
- OneWorld Community Health Centers focused on coaching staff at their on-site pharmacy.
- Several health centers enrolled staff in HCAN's Medical Assistant and Dental Assistant training programs.

INNOVATE | Midtown Health Center

Midtown Health Center rented an apartment for students and residents to stay at while completing clinical rotations. The apartment is walking distance to the clinic and located in the heart of Norfolk's business district, surrounded by restaurants and other attractions. Midtown is planning to house their first student in Spring 2025.

Clinical Optimization

Health Center Wins

- Bluestem Health added a behavioral health-specific module to the health record system, allowing staff to more efficiently document behavioral health care.
- OneWorld Community Health Center was able to use their Project Access funding to hire an additional **3** nurse midwives.
- Community Action Health Center worked with a consultant to identify strategies to decrease no-shows, and is now working to determine which strategies to implement.

Good Neighbor Community Health Center's team decreased their no-show rate from 26% to 16.4%. More kept appointments means more patients receiving care. **What worked:**

- Partner with a contractor to assess current processes.
- Purchase & install signature pads.
- Implement messaging through the patient portal.
- Provide incentives for increasing front-desk collections (15 distributed!)

Capital Improvement

- Bluestem Health completed a project to an unused room into usable office space for staff.
- Charles Drew Health Center obtained a second mobile unit to deliver care at public housing, schools, and community events.
- Charles Drew Health Center updated signage to provide wayfinding in Karen and braille, ensuring signage is accessible to more patients
- Community Action Health Center initiated planning for a lobby update and improvement.
- Good Neighbor Community Health Center completed an update of the patient waiting area to expand available space and provide options for future growth.
- Heartland Health Center purchased a jaundice meter for the clinic.
- Midtown Health Center purchased equipment to allow them to complete x-rays on site.
- OneWorld Community Health Centers added an additional exam room to their West Omaha clinic.

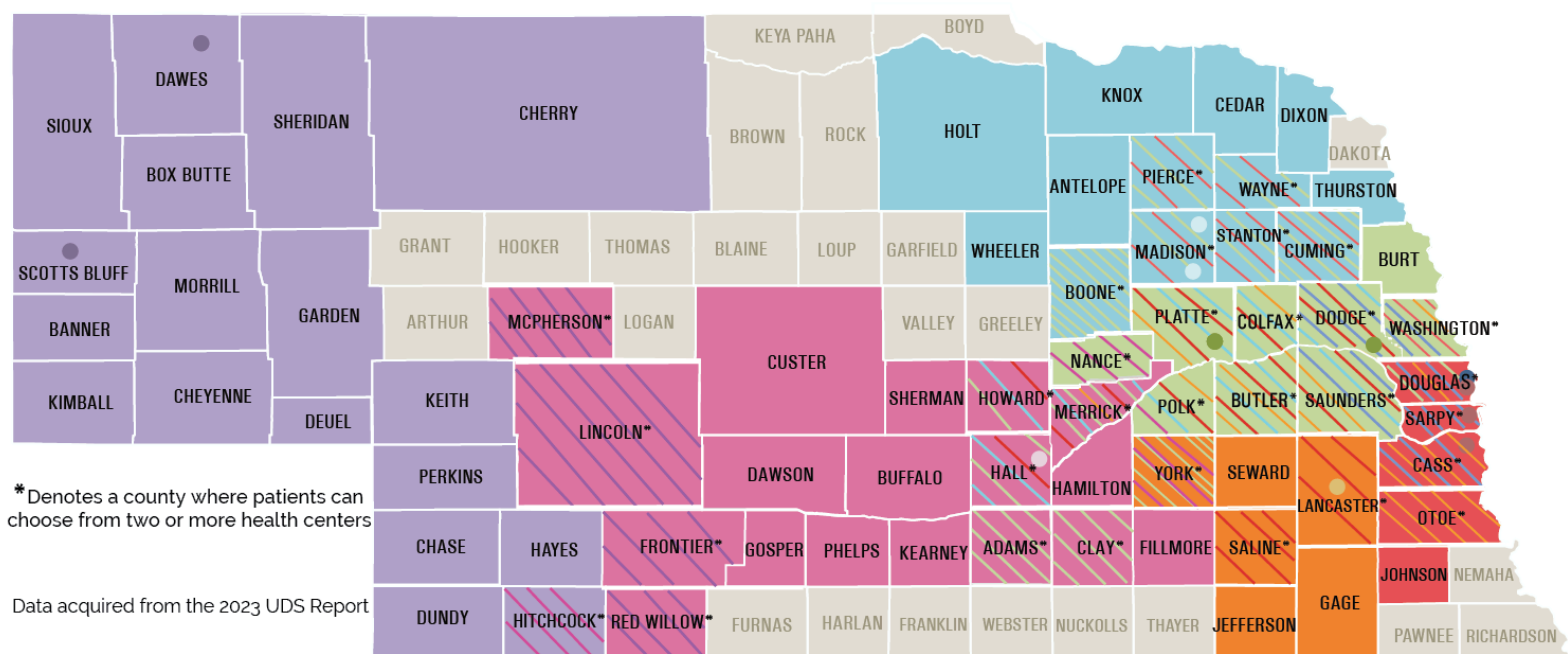


Impact on Access

Midtown Health Center completed **432 patient x-rays** in 2024. This addition allows patients to receive on-site, accessible imaging that leads to rapid diagnosis and treatment. It has also saved hundreds of patients from needing to drive to the hospital or neighboring cities for imaging services.



Nebraska Community Health Centers



Bluestem Health
 1021 North 27th St. | Lincoln, NE 68503
 Ph. 402.476.1455 | www.bluestemlincoln.com
 6 service delivery sites

Heartland Health Center
 2116 W. Faidley Ave | Grand Island, NE 68803
 Ph. 308.382.4297 | www.heartlandhealthcenter.org
 15 service delivery sites

Charles Drew Health Center, Inc.
 2915 Grant St. | Omaha, NE 68111
 Ph. 402.451.3553 | www.charlesdrew.com
 16 service delivery sites

Midtown Health Center
 302 West Phillip Ave | Norfolk, NE 68701
 Ph. 402.371.8000 | www.midtownhealthne.org
 19 service delivery sites

Community Action Health Center
 975 Crescent Dr. | Gering, NE 69341
 Ph. 308.632.2540 | www.capwn.org
 3 service delivery sites

OneWorld Community Health Centers, Inc.
 4920 South 30th St. | Omaha, NE 68107
 Ph. 402.734.4110 | www.oneworldomaha.org
 22 service delivery sites

Good Neighbor Community Health Center
 4321 41st Ave | Columbus, NE 68602
 Ph. 402.562.7500 | www.ecdhd.ne.gov
 5 service delivery sites

Needs of the State

HCAN, community health centers, and our valued collaborative partners continue to work together to bolster the community health infrastructure across the state and in our local communities.

“For 60 years, CHCs have built trust by providing effective, affordable, and comprehensive primary and preventive care that saves lives and money.” – Kyu Rhee, MD, MPP, National Association of Community Health Centers President & CEO

Community health centers have a strong track record of delivering substantial savings to the healthcare system by providing affordable, effective primary care and reducing utilization of higher-cost settings, such as Emergency Departments. Health centers contribute \$306 million to Nebraska’s economy, directly employ 1,200 Nebraskans, and save Nebraska’s healthcare system \$208 million annually. Collectively, health centers comprise one of the largest systems of primary health care in our state; and are the only statewide network that provides truly integrated medical, dental, and behavioral health services, with supportive wrap-around services, under one roof.

According to Milbank Memorial Fund’s *“The Health of US Primary Care: 2025 Scorecard Report”*, investments in primary care remain vital. In the US, states that invest more in primary care have fewer emergency room visits and avoidable hospitalizations. Yet, as a nation, we invest less than 5% of total healthcare spending on primary care. Underfunding primary care will hurt Nebraskans in the long-term.

Community health centers serve 1 in 7 Nebraska Medicaid patients. The decreasing number of Medicaid providers and/or providers that serve the uninsured population is a significant barrier to effective, timely care. While health centers do their best to mitigate gaps in primary care services, health centers have also not received an increase in their federal grant funding since 2015, making it exponentially harder to meet the needs in their communities.

Project Access funding and the work our health centers are doing to increase access to care has never been more important. Health centers remain strong financial investments given their continued savings to the system, high-quality clinical outcomes, and total economic impact.

“If we are going to transform health in this country, it will only happen with community health centers at the forefront.”
Sonja W. Bachus, National Association of Community Health Centers



On the Horizon

February 2025 marked the beginning of Project Access Year 3. HCAN is thrilled to welcome the Nebraska Blue Foundation to Project Access. Their 3-year financial commitment will support the expansion of primary care, behavioral health, and dental services across Nebraska's rural communities. They join the Centene Foundation, Nebraska Total Care, UnitedHealthcare Community Plan of Nebraska, and the Creighton Community Collaborative in their commitment to ensuring access to care for ALL Nebraskans.



Nebraska community health centers continue to submit workplans for review and approval by the Project Access Steering Committee. 2025 priority projects include:

- Addressing the significant need for oral health care throughout rural Nebraska
- The expansion of behavioral health services across the Omaha metro
- Collaborative efforts with academic partners on the development of additional on-site training opportunities and rural residencies
- Maintaining and expanding outreach & enrollment efforts to connect Nebraskans to needed health coverage and assistance
- Exploring innovative strategies to recruit providers and staff via HCAN's Recruitment Services Program
- Engage students and residents on health center employment opportunities

The Value of Individualized Priorities

Access to care can mean a variety of things. Each community is unique. HCAN is thankful that Project Access, its funders, and its Steering Committee values the flexibility and individuality this program provides. This funding allows Nebraska community health centers to innovate and focus on what matters most to their communities, their patients, and their families.

Thank You

HCAN's mission is to advance the health center movement through access, health, and well-being for ALL. The development, implementation, and expansion of Project Access provides health centers with the opportunity to retain high-performers, recruit and remain competitive in a tough fiscal environment, and foster partnerships with academic institutions to grow the workforce of the future. This work would not be possible without our partners and their financial investments.

Interested in learning more about Project Access? Please reach out to Jenna Thomsen, Director of Strategy and Development, at jlt@hcannebraska.org.

Every Nebraskan deserves access to cost-effective, community responsive healthcare. Let's make lasting change together.



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COMMUNITY ACTION PARTNERSHIP of WESTERN NEBRASKA



Bluestem Health



Charles Drew
HEALTH CENTER, INC.



OneWorld
Community Health Centers

MIDTOWN
HEALTH CENTER



Heartland
Health Center