



Connecting Communities Who Care

# TENNESSEE PRIMARY CARE ASSOCIATION

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MEDIA ADVISORY

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## National and State Health Care Leaders Plan Health Care Homes for All Tennesseans

**Franklin, TN** – Department of Health Commissioner Susan Cooper, National Association of Community Health Centers' representatives and community health care providers from across the state meet this weekend, April 26-28, during the Tennessee Primary Care Association's 32<sup>nd</sup> Annual Meeting. They'll discuss increasing access to primary health care for more Tennesseans. The Association is preparing to launch a campaign, "**Health Care Home Tennessee**" that will call for continued investment and partnership in Tennessee's Community Health Centers to strengthen their infrastructure and provide the necessary tools for growth so that they can serve over 500,000 medically needy Tennesseans by the year 2015.

"As our health centers see rapid growth in their patient numbers, it's critical for us to strive to ensure that everyone in Tennessee has *both* affordable insurance coverage *and* a regular source of primary health care – a health care home," said Kathy Wood-Dobbins, the Association's CEO. "The goal of the **Health Care Home Tennessee** plan is to connect all Tennesseans with affordable health care in their communities. The doors to these health care homes are open to everyone, including the uninsured and TennCare, Medicare, and privately insured patients."

Community Health Centers provide primary care services regardless of a patient's ability to pay and are strategically located in areas where private medical care is scarce, nonexistent or not easily accessible, such as an urban community or a rural county. Community Health Centers have over 150 sites providing primary health care services in the state. Tennessee's health centers have experienced a steady increase in their patient base, an average of about 10 percent each year. In 2006, Tennessee's health centers served over 273,000 people, 91 percent of them living below the poverty level and nearly 40 percent of them uninsured.

"Strengthening the primary care infrastructure in the state will lead to long-term systemic savings in Tennessee and a healthier state as a whole," said Wood-Dobbins. In order for Community Health Centers to keep up with the rising demand for accessible and affordable health care in Tennessee, the network of health centers across the state will require sustainable state and federal funding, increases in the primary care workforce, capital funding for renovated or new facilities and a focus on quality care that improves health outcomes.

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“These centers provide access to care in places where a shortage of health care remains a consistent problem. Their costs of care rank among the lowest, and they reduce the number of expensive emergency room and in-patient visits, saving billions for taxpayers and society.” Representative Marsha Blackburn said in a recent statement to the House of Representatives Energy and Commerce Health Subcommittee. She added, “[Community Health Centers] continue to provide invaluable service to address the needs of the medically underserved in Tennessee.”

Cara Dalmolin, a legislative aid for Congressman Blackburn, will be attending the Association’s conference to take part in the discussion around access to health care in Tennessee and the *Health Care Home Tennessee* plan.

**More about the conference:**

The 32<sup>nd</sup> Annual Conference will be held from April 26-28 at the Franklin Marriott Cool Springs in Franklin, TN. Guest speakers and presenters include...

- Commissioner Susan Cooper, TN Department of Health
- Cara Dalmolin, Legislative Aid, Office of Congressman Marsha Blackburn
- Lil Anderson, Board Chair, National Association of Community Health Centers
- Lorine Jay, Operations Director, ODII, US Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources & Services Administration, Office of Performance Review
- Marc Wetherhorn, National Advocacy Director, National Association of Community Health Centers

**About the Tennessee Primary Care Association (TPCA):**

Tennessee Primary Care Association (TPCA) is a nonprofit corporation connecting Tennesseans with a health care home, especially the medically underserved. Since its inception in 1976, TPCA committed to 1) identifying unmet needs and gaps in service access, 2) developing systems of care, 3) advocating for resources, and 4) promoting awareness of Community Health Centers. Membership includes 34 nonprofit primary care clinics across the state operating over 150 sites providing comprehensive medical care.

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