



TENNESSEE PRIMARY CARE  
ASSOCIATION

416 Wilson Pike Circle | Brentwood, TN 37027  
Jackie Crumley, Communications Coordinator  
615.329.3836 ext:30 | fax: 615.329.3823

NEWS RELEASE  
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## **Health Care Safety Net Funding in Jeopardy** ***Hundreds of Thousands of Tennesseans Potentially Impacted***

**Nashville, TN** – At the request of Governor Bredesen, the Department of Health recently proposed their budget cuts for the next fiscal year. In the 9 percent budget cut, the health care safety net would be entirely eliminated. The hardest impact of the cuts would fall on federally qualified health centers (FQHC) and other community and faith-based health centers across the state. These clinics provide care to hundreds of thousands of uninsured Tennesseans, a number that is growing as more people experience the impact of the downturn in the economy, the rise in unemployment and increased costs of health care.

“Cutting those funds will greatly hurt our health center and our patients, and I am sure it will hurt all the other FQHCs as well,” said Mary Heinzen, Executive Director of the Hardeman County Community Health Center in Bolivar, TN. The loss of the health care safety net would significantly impact FQHCs and other clinics that provide critical primary health care services to Tennesseans who cannot afford it otherwise. Mary Bufwack, Executive Director of United Neighborhood Health Services in Nashville said, “This would be a disaster for us all.”

Along with proposed budget cuts within the TennCare Bureau and the Department of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities, FQHCs and other community clinics will see a dramatic increase in patients while at the same time their funding is being cut. “We are approaching a 50% uninsured patient population and that is without any of the proposed budget reductions,” said Bonnie Pilon, Senior Associate Dean, Practice Management at Vanderbilt University School of Nursing, parent organization of University Community Health Services in Nashville.

“We will work diligently with the Governor, Commissioner Cooper, and the Tennessee General Assembly to find a way to protect these funds in the budget so that Tennesseans in distressed rural and urban communities continue to have access to primary health care,” said Kathy Wood-Dobbins, CEO of the Tennessee Primary Care Association.

Governor Bredesen and Department of Health Commissioner Susan Cooper have been strong supporters of FQHCs and the Tennesseans they serve citing the benefits of the FQHC’s community-based, high quality, and cost effective model of care. They have demonstrated a deep understanding of the growing need for affordable, comprehensive, and accessible health care in the state and have repeatedly found ways to provide vital primary care services.

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 non-profit primary care clinics across the state who provide comprehensive medical care.