

Ohio Association of Free Clinics

What is the Ohio Association of Free Clinics?

The Ohio Association of Free Clinics (O AFC) was founded in November 2000. The mission of the O AFC is to advocate for high quality health services by mobilizing resources, strengthening member clinics and acting as a powerful voice for underserved Ohioans. Thirty-six (36) free clinics currently belong to the O AFC.

Why does Ohio have Free Clinics?

The free clinic movement began in the late 1960's to address the needs of the working poor and uninsured. A Families USA analysis of Census data found that 2.8 million Ohioans under the age of 65 went without health insurance during 2002 and 2003. The 2004 Ohio Family Health Survey found that while the percentage of uninsured children in Ohio decreased from 1998 to 2004 (due to the expansion of Medicaid coverage through CHIP), the percentage of uninsured adults increased from 11.5 percent to 12.5 percent. Census data released in August 2006 found that the number of uninsured Ohioans increased from 1.3 in 2004 to 1.4 million in 2005. The erosion of employer-based health insurance and the loss of manufacturing jobs have influenced this trend.

Using cost-effective strategies, free clinics help people to get and stay well until they have access to health insurance. These strategies mean that every dollar invested in free clinics brings about \$8.00 in care for patients. Free clinics provide access to care for many who find themselves temporarily unemployed or unable to obtain employer-based health insurance. They also allow many adults to acquire or maintain employment, as well as keep their children in school. By utilizing almost 3,600 volunteers, including nearly 1,200 physicians, as well as paid staff, O AFC member clinics provided over nearly 100,000 visits in 2006 to Ohio's uninsured and underinsured.

What defines Free Clinics?

According to the Ohio Revised Code, a free clinic is a nonprofit organization exempt from federal income taxation under section 501 (c)(3) of the "Internal Revenue Code of 1986", as amended, or a program component of a nonprofit organization, whose primary mission is to provide health care services for free or for a minimal administrative fee to individuals with limited resources.

A free clinic facilitates the delivery of health care services through the use of volunteer health care professionals and voluntary care networks. Free clinics must comply with all of the following:

- a) If a free clinic requests a minimal administrative fee, a free clinic shall not deny an individual access to its health care services based on an individual's ability to pay the fee.
- b) A free clinic shall not bill a patient for health care services rendered.
- c) Free clinics shall not perform operations, as defined by divisions (A)(9) and (F)(1)(b) of section 2305.234 of the Ohio Revised Code.

A clinic is not a free clinic if the clinic bills Medicaid, Medicare, or other third-party payers for health care services rendered at the clinic, and receives 25% or more of the clinic's annual revenue from the third-party payments.

Free Clinics are committed to:

- minimizing barriers to care through community-based efforts,
- providing quality care that is monitored by internal controls and procedures
- obtaining a varied base of community support, including: individuals, businesses, churches, foundations, and state and national government

How do Free Clinics Operate?

Free clinics offer health care services to people who have few, if any, other options by utilizing cost effective strategies, such as in-kind services and other donations of health care resources and mobilizing volunteers. Free clinics have developed networks of dedicated, talented medical professionals who volunteer their time to serve those who are unable to attain and maintain quality, affordable health care. Many free clinics operate during selected evening hours when volunteers are available. Services vary, but may include: primary care, prescription assistance, dental, vision, behavioral health and other specialties. Prescriptions are filled through patient assistance programs, purchased and donated medications and samples.

Free clinics do not claim to be the answer to the health care crisis. While systemic change is necessary, people who are sick and living in poverty today cannot wait until this change occurs. Without free clinics, people who are uninsured and unable to afford health care will most likely go to hospital emergency rooms, the most costly form of care. The end result is higher health care costs for everyone.

How are Free Clinics Funded?

Free clinics are funded by local foundations, government funding, individual donors, faith communities, the United Way and other corporate donors.

What are the Goals of the Ohio Association of Free Clinics?

1. To develop stable, diverse funding for the Association and its member clinics.
2. To heighten the public's awareness of the vital services provided by free clinics.
3. To increase the paid membership of the Association.
4. To encourage the expansion of volunteerism in free clinics.
5. To enhance and standardize the services provided by member clinics.
6. To strengthen the leadership of the Association.

Need More Information?

Go to www.ohiofreeclinics.org or contact Marjorie Frazier, OAFCE Executive Director, 614-221-6494, mfrazier@ohiofreeclinics.org