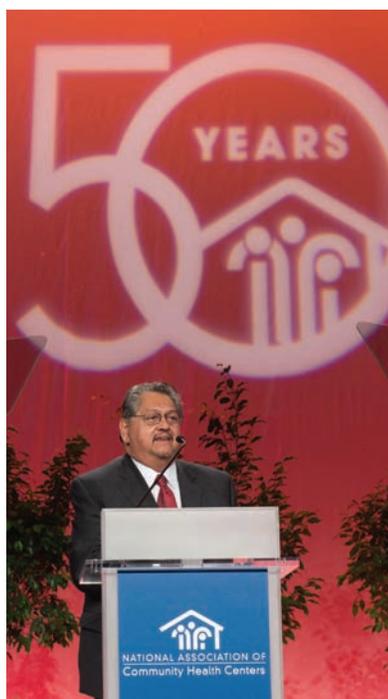


2015 Community Health Institute and Expo Wrap Up



Great optimism marked the 46th Annual Community Health Institute (CHI) & Expo (August 23-25). Bolstered by a successful and celebratory year, more than 1600 health center executives and administrators, board members, clinicians, advocates and partners assembled in Orlando, Florida, ready to continue the journey that began 50 years ago to bring healthcare to the nation's medically underserved.

Passing the Reins

At the opening session, the reins of leadership on the NACHC Board passed to **J. Ricardo Guzman**, president and CEO of Community Health & Social Services in Detroit. As the first order of business, Guzman moved to thank his predecessor **Dr. Gary M. Wiltz** for his outstanding work and leadership as Board Chair over the past two years. Wiltz was presented with the "Chair's Gavel" — a symbol of leadership and service to the Health Center Movement.

In his inaugural address, Guzman applauded the NACHC family for nurturing a dream that has created a community-based health system for the nation. "Now serving close to 25 million people from all walks of life," he said, "that system today

holds greatest potential to transform healthcare delivery."

Guzman spoke of the achievements of the year that secured \$1.4 billion in additional funding for health centers in fiscal year 2015 for new starts, base grant adjustments, and expanded services. He also underscored the victory of health center advocates — averting the primary care funding cliff. Congressional passage of HR. 2 last April assures health centers of \$7.5 billion in continued funding support over the next two years — as well as continued funding for the National Health Service Corps and the Teaching Health Centers Program.

Guzman noted, however, that despite progress, health centers face challenges. He called for 20/20



vision in meeting those challenges, including working to sustain public investment and a stable funding base for the Health Center Program; protecting health centers' unique reimbursement under both Medicare and Medicaid, especially with respect to accountable care platforms and new payment models. He also noted the need for every health center to press forward in the pursuit of operational excellence to create greater value and to find solutions that can lead to better care and healthcare outcomes for patients and reduced healthcare costs. "Clearly, there are no easy answers to many of the challenges we face as providers. But staying the course, working as

a team, collaborating and supporting each other — together we can find those solutions."

Words of Wisdom

A spirited NACHC welcome greeted keynote speaker **Lowell Weicker**, former U.S. Senator, Congressman and Governor of Connecticut. In his 30 years of public service, Weicker is credited with spearheading the Americans with Disabilities Act and advancing health programs in the United States. And that includes not only the Health Center Program, but advancing medical research, funding for child and maternal health, HIV/AIDS treatment, behavioral health services,



and others. Weicker's remarks lamented today's political wrangling in Congress that has brought the nation's business to a halt. He said the nation is failing to address the real issues of the time — healthcare among them. He urged citizen participation to reverse this trend — calling on Americans to assume responsibility and to be at the forefront as citizens in a democracy.

Remembering the Past, Looking to the Future

Throughout the conference, general sessions focused on the future. Enlightening panel discussions were coupled with presenta-





tions by officials from the Health Resources and Services Administration and the Veterans Administration, as well as by **Dr. Farzad Mostashari**, former National Coordinator for Health Information Technology and **Dr. John A. Powell**, Director of the Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society.

At the same time, anniversary tributes to the Health Center Program continued to flow. On behalf of President Obama and the Administration, video messages were received from **Valerie Jarrett**, Senior Advisor to the President, and **Dr. Mary Wakefield**, Acting Deputy Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services. Words of support also were voiced in messages from the powerful Chairs of the Senate and House Appropriations Subcommit-



tees on Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education: U.S. Senator **Roy Blunt** (R-MO) and Congressman **Tom Cole** (R-OK). A message from State Senator **Edward Kennedy, Jr.** (D-CT), evoked memories of his father, the late **Edward M. Kennedy**, whose proud legacy is forever embedded in health center history.

Recognizing Partners

The NACHC family also paused to recognize individuals whose leadership in the federal government has been key to the expansion of healthcare access and success of the Health Center Program. Honored were **Dr. Marilyn Gaston** and **Dr. Edward D. Martin**, both former assistant surgeon generals and heads of the Bureau of Primary Health Care, as well as **Jim McCrae**, acting HRSA Administrator.

Congressman **Danny Davis** (D-IL) also was recognized as a *Hero for Health Centers*. The Congressman delivered an impassioned address, recalling how health centers emerged from the missions of Dr. Martin Luther King, Medgar Evers, Cesar Chavez — the marches and demonstrations of the civil rights movement, and the War on Poverty. His remembrance of the early pioneers — the community activists, the doctors and nurses, the Board members who helped put the health center model on its feet — moved everyone.

A Night to Remember

Yet, it was the Gala Celebration that joined colleagues and friends in a final salute to their 50th Anniversary Year. The evening's program, hosted by **Yvonne Davis**, NACHC Consumer Representative on the Board, was dedicated to Consumer Board Members — the men and women often called the heart and soul of the health center model. During ceremonies, NACHC's leadership expressed appreciation to all health center board members past and present for serving their health centers and communities. Also recognized were board members who had served in leadership posts bringing the voice of patients and com-





munities to the national level: **Dr. Bobbie Maniece-Harrison, Kautila Clark, Michael Wurtsmith, and Joseph Feaster.**

Capping the evening was the inspiring speech of **Dr. Paula A. Johnson**, founder and director of the Center for Cardiovascular Disease and director of the Connors Center for Women’s Health and Gender Biology at Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Boston. She stated: “Your movement, the community health center movement, was born out of the civil rights movement, and it is critical that we look at them together because health – the right to healthcare and the ability to live a healthy life are among the most basic human rights.”

Going back 50 years, she said, “there are many lessons to be learned from the founding of both the [community health center] and civil rights movements – lessons we need to apply today in order to advance health and healthcare.” Her message rang out: “Health is the unfinished work of the civil rights movement!” She called for a rekindled movement – one that mobilizes the passion of people demanding not only health for themselves, but for their families, their communities and our nation.



Like every CHI conference, this year’s program was busy and productive. Tending to organizational business, the NACHC Board assessed the year’s progress. Members took to the task of electing officers: **James Luisi**, CEO of North East Waterfront Health in Boston was unanimously elected NACHC’s Chair-Elect; and **Henry Taylor**, president and CEO of Mile Square Health Center in Chicago was elected NACHC Speaker of the House.

In addition, the NACHC family took every opportunity to interact, to reach out and welcome new members, and to learn. With all eyes focused on the challenges and opportunities ahead, NACHC’s multiple education, workshops and training sessions were not to be

missed. NACHC also honored its own with the presentation of nine *Community Health Care Awards of Excellence*. Retiring colleague **Tary L. Brown**, CEO of Albany Area Primary Health Care (GA) also was honored with the *Betsey Cooke Spirit of Excellence Legacy Award* for his service to the Health Center Mission.

Closing out a historic year – NACHC members stood proud of their accomplishments and ready to open a new chapter in health center history. ♦

[Speeches and materials from the 2015 CHI can be accessed via the MyNACHC Learning Center at www.mylearning.nachc.com]