

IAFCC Response to FY27 Illinois Governor JB Pritzker State of the State Address

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On behalf of the 37 clinics that make up the Illinois Association of Free & Charitable Clinics, we applaud Governor J. B. Pritzker's vision for an Illinois grounded in empathy, kindness, and practical action. His continued commitment to affordability for Illinois residents through initiatives aimed at things like reducing medical debt and expanding affordable housing reflects a deep understanding of the many factors that impact community health. These priorities will directly strengthen the well-being of the communities we serve.

Over the past year, free and charitable clinics have stepped forward to ensure that some of our most vulnerable neighbors could still access high-quality, free or low-cost care when they needed it most. That commitment translated into more than 135,000 medical, dental, and behavioral health visits for uninsured and underinsured residents. Yet even this number tells an incomplete story. Many immigrant patients missed critical appointments out of fear of detention on their way to seek care. Due to the unique agility of the free and charitable clinics sector, clinics adapted with urgency and compassion by expanding telehealth, transportation support, home visits, and mobile services so patients could continue to receive care safely and with dignity.

Since first receiving state support in FY2023, clinics have more than doubled the amount of care delivered across Illinois, and behavioral health visits have quadrupled. This investment has proven what we have always known: when the state partners with community-based clinics, access expands, outcomes improve, and entire communities grow stronger.

Looking ahead, the fiscal pressures outlined by the Illinois Governor's Office of Management and Budget — including an estimated \$1.7 billion impact on health care costs alone from HR1 and the possibility that 500,000 residents could lose Medicaid coverage — underscore the urgency of protecting our health care safety net. Free and charitable clinics are uniquely positioned to absorb part of this strain. Last year alone, a \$9 million state investment generated more than \$70 million in health care services and emergency department diversions. As demand grows, sustained and increased investment in our clinic network will be essential to prevent gaps in care for the uninsured. This year, to meet the expanded need, the free and charitable clinics are requesting an increase in state funding to \$15 million. This will help clinics continue to be trusted, community-based, and culturally competent medical homes for both the immigrant community and other newly uninsured Illinois residents.

Every day, free and charitable clinics perform quiet acts of courage rooted in love for our neighbors and the belief that health care is a fundamental human right. We stand ready to advance the priorities outlined today and to work alongside the Governor to strengthen Illinois' health care safety net for all.