

COMMUNITY HEALTHCARE TRAFFIC SURGES OWING TO UNEMPLOYMENT



The Obama administration said on Tuesday that the US community health centers witnessed an increased flow of patient traffic. This swelled their ranks by almost 18 percent between 2008 and 2011. These health centers are the only source of medical treatment for the poorer section of American society and for those who lack medical insurance. A report released by the White House, said that whereas 17 million Americans received healthcare at these centers four years ago, their numbers had now increased to 20 million. There are around 85,000 community health centers in the US serving low income areas that lack medical facilities, doctors, nurses and other medical personnel. Community health centers are non-profit groups. The people who frequent them are mostly from low socio-income groups. A majority of them are migrant workers with limited English proficiency. Mary Wakefield, who heads the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration, speaking to reporters said, "Those numbers really took a big jump, a lot of those folks were people who, when they lost their jobs early on, lost their coverage." The administration said that the community health centers were able to meet the challenges of the extra-load and cope with accommodation and resources issues, only because of the extra-funding provided to them by President Obama's healthcare reform law and the economic stimulus packages that they had announced earlier. This release is perhaps aimed at a vindication of the much beleaguered and attacked Obama healthcare plan and, strategically timed to coincide with the US Supreme Court's deliberations about the future of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. The law seeks to expand the Community healthcare access to more than 30 million Americans who do not have medical insurance. One in four Americans are uninsured and continued unemployment insures that their ranks continue to increase. They pose a major human challenge to the administration and a financial and resource challenge to the \$2.6 trillion healthcare system. However, what could derail the plan of the administration to expand health coverage is that the courts could, in a ruling to be announced next month, overturn the reforms, which would be the end for their planned support for expansion of these community health centers. The law also faces strong opposition from the Republican politicians who said that the Government is straining itself to achieve something that is not achievable and is pulling the economy down. The administration in its continued thrust towards revamping the community health centers allotted \$728 million in grants to renovate and construct projects at community health centers. Government officials say that the increased facilities would allow an additional 860,000 people to obtain medical services at these centers. Altogether, the Obama administration has allocated \$1.5 billion to these centers that has gone towards creating a newer and better infrastructure, purchasing better equipment and renovating existing facilities. A White House report says that the number of people seeking healthcare at the Community Health Centers is expected to increase by an additional 1.3 million people over the next couple of years, foretelling a challenge that could reach insurmountable proportions, unless the plan's detractors and advocates reach a consensus.