

Blue Safety Net

County Snapshot 2015

Introduction

The Southeastern Pennsylvania region of Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, and Philadelphia counties is a microcosm of the country as a whole — a large redeveloping urban center, connected suburban communities, rural agricultural areas, and growing immigrant populations. Each community and population faces unique challenges in accessing health care. Although Southeastern Pennsylvania is known for its world-class hospitals and universities, health centers are often on the front lines of health care — treating hard-to-reach populations in the most underserved neighborhoods.

Health centers offer quality primary care services, and many offer fully integrated dental care, behavioral health services, health education, and social services. Health center models include Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), hospital-affiliated centers, and non-profit, free clinics. They range in size from those that treat a few patients one night per week, to those that treat tens of thousands of patients annually. FQHCs are the most studied health center model, as they receive government funding to operate in designated medically underserved areas or to treat specific populations and have required reporting to the federal government. FQHCs reach more than 25 million patients each year across the country.¹ Free clinics are less studied and often operate outside the private health care system; they rely heavily on volunteers and donations and typically dedicate themselves to serving the uninsured. In 2015, free clinics saw 1.7 million patients across the country.²

All health center models encounter distinctive issues reaching and engaging patients. Enabling services provided at health centers help reduce real and perceived barriers to care and address the multitude of needs often present in the characteristic patient population, such as appointment availability, transportation, and language barriers. These enabling services help to address the social determinants of health that affect an individual's well-being, as well as their ability to access health care.

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Health centers' critical impact

Health centers drive efficiency and cost-savings for the health system by providing quality, cost-effective care. One study shows that FQHCs alone save the health system \$1,263 per patient per year.³

Derived savings in health care spending in the Southeastern Pennsylvania region from patients receiving care at Blue Safety Net-supported FQHCs is more than \$143 million annually.⁴

Health center availability and capacity has also been shown to reduce emergency department utilization among populations that historically experience access challenges.⁵

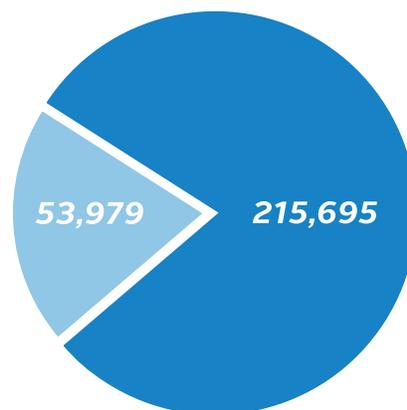
Health centers are well positioned to provide quality, holistic primary care because they typically possess an intimate knowledge of local communities and understand the resources necessary to fully address the underserved population's health needs.

Southeastern Pennsylvania's uninsured population

Regionally, nearly 36 percent of the population was uninsured or covered by Medicaid/Medicare in 2015.^{6,7} Publicly insured and uninsured individuals have historically faced access challenges within the health care system, particularly access to primary care. In 2015, it is estimated that 269,674 individuals in Southeastern Pennsylvania were uninsured.⁷ By improving access for individuals who may otherwise forgo or delay care, Blue Safety Net-supported health centers served 20 percent of the region's uninsured population in 2015.

Point of Care for Uninsured Individuals in the Region in 2015

20 percent of the region's uninsured population received care at a health center supported by the Blue Safety Net program in 2015.

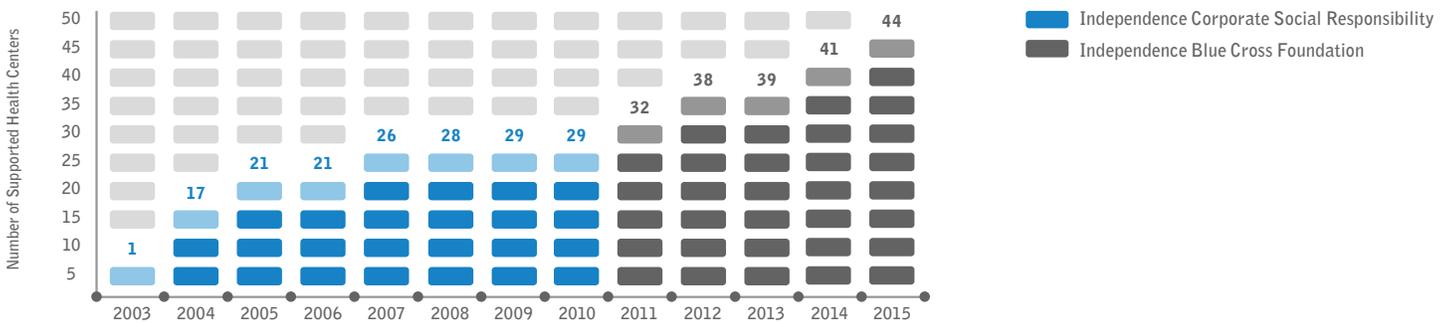


- Number of uninsured patients who received care at a clinic supported by the Blue Safety Net program
- Number of uninsured patients who did not receive care at a clinic supported by the Blue Safety Net program, or received care in another setting

The Independence Blue Cross Foundation: Strengthening access to health care

In 2003, Independence Blue Cross (Independence) began its Charitable Medical Grant program to safeguard access to health care in the community. Over the next seven years, Independence invested nearly \$13 million in 29 health centers in the Southeastern Pennsylvania region. In 2011, these organizations received grants from the newly created Independence Blue Cross Foundation (Foundation). Since then, the Foundation has awarded nearly \$13 million over four years to health centers supported through the Blue Safety Net program. In 2015, more than 40 primary care, dental, and vision centers were funded through the Blue Safety Net program.

Growth in Health Center Partners



The Foundation's role is to improve the health of communities in which people live, work, and play. To achieve a shared mission of a healthier community, the Foundation strives to collaborate with all stakeholders to find new ways to deliver care that addresses the unmet needs of our community and empowers individuals to live healthier lives.

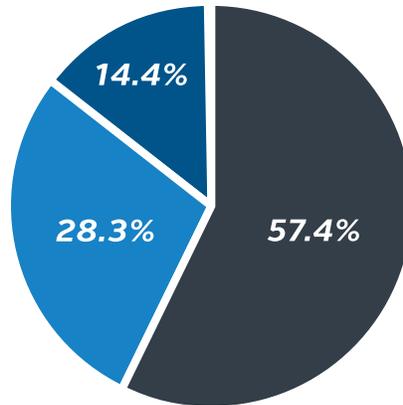
In 2014, the Foundation commissioned Drexel University Dornsife School of Public Health to conduct a needs assessment of the Blue Safety Net program. The assessment enabled health center leadership to provide insight into their organizational capacity for sustained growth and care provision in the landscape. The resulting recommendations led to a strategic redesign of the Blue Safety Net program. Under the new structure, the Foundation continued to award general operating funds and began offering additional grant funding to targeted capacity-building projects that increase access to quality care and promote sustainability at health centers, such as behavioral health service integration in primary care, National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA) and Patient-Centered Medical Home (PCMH) accreditation, and tailored workshops on marketing and grant writing for health centers.

The Blue Safety Net grant program

In 2015, Blue Safety Net-supported health centers provided quality health care services to more than 190,000 unique individuals. More than 85 percent of these individuals accessing care at Blue Safety Net-supported health centers are uninsured or publicly insured through Medicaid, Medicare, or CHIP. The impact of the Blue Safety Net program is illustrated by the county-level data derived from the 2015 American Community Survey 1 Year Estimates,^{7,8} and Blue Safety Net program data which was self-reported by health center grantees in 2015, excluding one vision center in Montgomery County.

2015 Blue Safety Net Health Center Patients by Insurance Status

More than 85 percent of the patients seeking care at Blue Safety Net-supported health centers are uninsured or publicly insured.



- Public Insurance (Medicaid, Medicare, CHIP)
- Uninsured
- Private Insurance

Bucks County

Bucks County is located north of Philadelphia County and consists of rural and suburban communities. The county is populated by 627,367 residents, and 29,482 residents are uninsured. Of the four Bucks County health centers supported by the Blue Safety Net program, three are primary care health centers and one is a dental health center. The Foundation awarded \$275,000 in grants to these centers in 2015. During that year, the Blue Safety Net-supported health centers saw 7,754 individual patients and treated 12.57 percent of the uninsured population in Bucks County.

There are no federally designated medically underserved areas in Bucks County.⁹ FQHCs must serve designated areas or populations; therefore, the Blue Safety Net-supported health centers in Bucks County are hospital affiliate or free clinic models. Both the county population and the Blue Safety Net-supported health centers are spread out across Bucks County — representative of the county's more rural nature. Accessing non-urgent care becomes a time consuming process — which often needs to be scheduled during the workday when working-class people cannot afford to take time off. Transportation and travel time are large barriers to accessing health care in Bucks County.



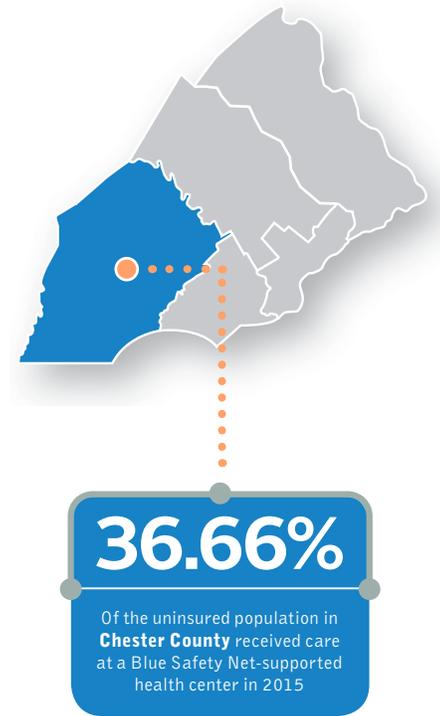
12.57%

Of the uninsured population in **Bucks County** received care at a Blue Safety Net-supported health center in 2015

Chester County

Chester County is located west of Philadelphia County and contains many rural and suburban communities. The county population consists of 515,939 residents, and in recent years, has seen a large influx of Latino immigrants, which represented 7.3 percent of the county's population in 2015.⁸ Chester County has 26,415 uninsured residents. The Blue Safety Net program supports four primary care health centers in Chester County, which saw 14,354 individual patients in 2015. The Foundation awarded \$400,000 in grants to these health centers in 2015. Blue Safety Net-supported health centers treated 17.34 percent of the Latino population and 36.66 percent of the uninsured population in Chester County in 2015.

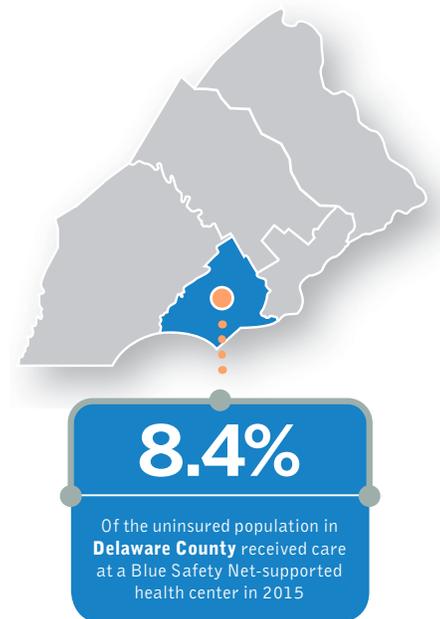
Despite the affluence of Chester County, defined pockets of poverty and need remain. Blue Safety Net-supported health centers in Chester County are strategically located near these areas — reducing transportation barriers that may prevent health care utilization in a suburban and rural county. Two of the four Chester County Blue Safety Net-supported health centers are specifically for uninsured individuals, and one FQHC sees large numbers of uninsured migrant workers as well. The two health centers located in the areas with a strong presence of Latino immigrants have bilingual staff and programming to engage with these patients and provide culturally competent care for the community.



Delaware County

Delaware County is located southwest of Philadelphia County and consists of a mix of urban and suburban communities. The county population is 563,894 residents and is home to the city of Chester, one of the most depressed cities in the state.¹⁰ Delaware County has 29,180 uninsured residents. The Blue Safety Net program supports two primary care health centers in Delaware County, both of which are FQHCs located in high need areas — one of which is the City of Chester. The Foundation awarded \$225,000 in grants to these health centers in 2015. During that year, these health centers saw 15,022 individual patients and treated 8.4 percent of the uninsured population in Delaware County.

Though Blue Safety Net-supported health centers in Chester County and Delaware County see similar numbers of patients, and the counties' uninsured rates are similar as well, health centers in Chester County are designed specifically for the uninsured while the FQHCs in Delaware County attract predominantly publicly insured individuals. Additionally, the proximity of health care services in Philadelphia County could draw Delaware County residents into the city to access care.



Montgomery County

Montgomery County is located northwest of Philadelphia County and holds a mix of rural and suburban communities. The county has 819,264 residents, and 34,376 residents are uninsured. Of the seven health centers supported by the Blue Safety Net program in Montgomery County, five are primary care health centers, one is a dental center, and one is a vision center. In 2015 the Foundation awarded \$340,000 in grants to these health centers. During that same year, these health centers saw 14,645 individual patients and treated 21.82 percent of the uninsured population in Montgomery County.

Montgomery County has the lowest uninsured rates in the southeastern Pennsylvania region.⁷ It also has more health centers relative to the other suburban counties. Many of these health centers are hospital system or university affiliated centers, and are located on medical campuses. The co-location of hospitals, universities, and health centers allows for better care coordination, particularly for uninsured patients seeking primary care. There are no health centers exclusively for the uninsured in Montgomery County, though some are located close to pockets of need like Norristown, which may alleviate transportation barriers and increase accessibility.



21.82%

Of the uninsured population in **Montgomery County** received care at a Blue Safety Net-supported health center in 2015



20.39%

Of the uninsured population in **Philadelphia County** received care at a Blue Safety Net-supported health center in 2015

Philadelphia County

Philadelphia County is the business and cultural center of the region and is a predominantly urban county. The county has 1,567,442 residents, 150,221 of whom are uninsured. The city has the largest populations of black and Latino minorities in the area. Of the 26 health centers supported by the Blue Safety Net program in Philadelphia County, 24 are primary care health centers, one is a dental center, and one is a vision health care center. These health centers saw 138,214 patients in 2015. The Foundation awarded \$1,746,677 in grants to these organizations in 2015. The health centers supported by the Blue Safety Net program treated 20.39 percent of the uninsured population and 12.61 percent of the public insurance population in Philadelphia County in 2015. They also treated 18.78 percent of the city's Latino population.

Out of the five counties, Philadelphia County has the highest population density, rates of poverty, and number of immigrants and uninsured individuals in the region.^{7,11,12} Sensibly, there are also numerous health centers dedicated to providing care to all of these individuals. Though there are only two health centers exclusively for the uninsured, the FQHCs and non-profit centers in Philadelphia County all serve large numbers of uninsured patients, especially those centers located in poor or immigrant neighborhoods. Philadelphia County also has a network of eight city health centers that provide ambulatory care to city residents.¹³

Conclusion

After years of strategic and successful support, the Blue Safety Net program has grown to be a regional resource for and about health centers. While every county and health center is different, each has an important role in improving access to quality health and wellness care in the five-county Southeastern Pennsylvania region.

The Blue Safety Net program is a network of Foundation-supported health centers that seeks to bridge gaps in services, provide culturally competent and holistic care, and provide a source of care for those who may otherwise use the emergency room or delay seeking care.

While this data brief is illustrative of the program's impact on the region, it is important to note that county-level data can mask community identity and need. As a whole, the southeastern Pennsylvania region is one of the most affluent in the state¹⁴, but this fact can hide the populations suffering from poverty and poor health outcomes, especially in suburban counties.

When evaluating the region, it is essential to engage with the people and needs that are not immediately visible to improve the health and wellness of the entire community.

For over 50 years, health centers have been a constant; providing affordable, quality primary care to those who need it most. Their timely, appropriate care saves the United States healthcare system \$24 billion annually.¹⁵ With so many community members relying on health centers to keep them well, the Independence Blue Cross Foundation will continue to invest in safeguarding access to quality and affordable health services for our community.

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