



MEDICUS IT

CHC TRENDS

A MID-YEAR REPORT



OACHC
Ohio Association of Community Health Centers



"As goes Ohio, so goes the nation" may be debatable when it comes to politics. But with its thriving, diverse variety of Community Health Centers (CHCs), Ohio very well may be the bellwether for CHCs nationwide.

With that in mind, we spoke with the Ohio Association of Community Health Center's Jessica Ball, Health Center Control Network Director, Ashley Ballard, Chief Quality Officer, and Teresa Rios-Bishop, Chief Operating Officer, about how 2024 has treated Ohio's CHCs. Our conversation centered on the general landscape of community health, the role technology is playing, and what CHCs nationwide can learn from Ohio's example. Here's what we learned:

The most critical issues facing Ohio CHCs today:



Workforce. Human capital is the essence of healthcare. CHC workforces must have a mission-driven attitude as well as tech-savvy skills. So that means caregiving "soft skills" as well as clinicians willing to learn the technologies in everything they do.



Cybersecurity. It's crucial to have policies and practices in place, to understand what to do when an event occurs – be it phishing, ransomware, or a more severe breach of sensitive information – because at this point, it's when, not if.



Funding. To protect both the work force and the technology, and to increase access in our under resourced communities, adequate funding streams must be available. To make sure that Health Centers are successful both today and into the future when it comes to either technology or just the healthcare landscape in general, CHCs need to ensure diversified funding streams.



Maintenance of and Advocacy for the CHC Model. Understanding the importance of Health Centers is essential – from the mission, care and heart side to dollars-and-cents value and return on investment, to the importance of ensuring access to services under one roof. CHCs make it possible for busy people to get behavioral health, dental, and primary care services in one fell swoop.

The real issue is to ensure people have the preventative access they need to stay healthy, as well as manage their conditions appropriately before they become critical, which if not done correctly isn't good for the patient nor the costs to the health care system as a whole. Rios-Bishop affirms, "The Community Health Center program emerged from the civil rights movement, with programs advocating for high-quality, equitable and accessible healthcare as an essential right. Keeping that mission alive is as important today as it was 60 years ago."





Ohio as a Template for Community Healthcare Center Success in Other States

While there may be a general perception that innovation and progress begin on either coast, then filter into the Midwest, Ohio CHCs are leading the way in five key areas:

- **The Primary Care Workforce Initiative.** Ohio is one of the first states in the nation to establish a preceptor program, funded by the state, in which CHCs partner with schools, exposing medical, dental, behavioral health, NP and PA students to advanced primary care settings serving the most vulnerable populations. The idea is to provide valuable education while modeling career paths that would enable young adults to make valuable contributions to comprehensive, primary care and prosper in underrepresented communities.

AI has the capability to transform healthcare by making processes more efficient, accessible and patient centric.

- **Ohio Primary Care Innovation Network.** Ohio CHCs are working diligently to ensure that there is equity in clinical research studies and clinical trials. This is exciting because, as Rios-Bishop notes, "Underrepresented populations don't often have the access or the opportunity to participate in research studies or clinical trials, but would certainly benefit from innovative, cutting-edge approaches to care."

- **Behavioral Health and Substance Use Disorder Care Integration.** Ohio CHCs were among the first to integrate behavioral health and substance use disorder care into primary care settings. This integrated approach removes care silos that prevent the full application of best practices for this essential form of community care.

- **The Ohio Data Integration Platform.** OACHC partnered with Azara Healthcare in 2018 to leverage their integrated data reporting and an analytics platform for Ohio CHCs. The Ohio Data Integration Platform (ODIP) provides actionable data to close care gaps at the point of care, enhance quality improvement initiatives, and optimize efficiencies. CHCs leverage the data to identify high risk patients, utilization rates, and support value based care initiatives. The platform enables CHCs to make measurable improvements in the quality and delivery of healthcare in Ohio.

- **Artificial Intelligence.** Ohio CHCs are taking a strategic approach in optimizing artificial intelligence in operational and clinical workflows. AI has the capability to transform healthcare by making processes more efficient, accessible and patient centric. This process is in its early stages, but Ashley Ballard explains, "AI has a tremendous potential to extend limited financial and human resources while simultaneously increasing quality of care and improving outcomes, on both an individual and a community basis."





Why OACHC Works with Medicus IT

When the OACHC evaluates partners to work with its health centers, the first question asked always is, "Do you know what a Community Health Center is?" Rios-Bishop appreciates the apparent simplicity of the question but affirms that most people do not understand the value CHCs provide, and how CHCs are fundamentally different from typical hospital health systems, and other provider types. "They don't understand what it means to be a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) or how Health Centers occupy a very specific niche with highly integrated care."

Ball, Rios-Bishop, and Ballard agree, however, that such a lack of understanding is never the case with Medicus IT, whose professionals understand and support the critical work of CHCs with a wide range of healthcare IT services built specifically for the unique needs of the CHC healthcare model.

To learn more about
Medicus IT and how we can
support your community health
centers and programs,
contact us at [MedicusIT.com](https://www.MedicusIT.com)

To learn more about
Ohio's Community Health Centers,
visit www.ohiochc.org

