

Proposal for Expansion to Indigent Medical Care

In response to community concern about access to health care for the uninsured and low income population in Pinellas County and the hospitals' perception that County government is not meeting its obligation to offset the cost of uncompensated care they bear, Pinellas County has been working diligently to address these issues and proposes to enhance funding to the hospitals and expand primary care in the community.

We recognize that hospitals are trying to deal with mounting costs and increases in uncompensated care. Pinellas County has maintained its commitment to provide medical services to the indigent, and as a further demonstration of that commitment, will provide an additional \$2,000,000.00 during Fiscal Year 2004 to local hospitals to defray their costs for uncompensated care.

Also recognizing that there remains a need for primary care for the indigent and working poor in Pinellas County, and geographical areas which are underserved, the County plans to promote community partnerships, in conjunction with area hospitals and other organizations, to address these gaps in the delivery system and enhance the relationship between the Health Department and non-profit health care providers.

Pinellas County will contract with Community Health Centers of Pinellas, Inc., in the amount of \$1,000,000.00, to provide the following:

- Two primary care clinics offered through the Health Department locations in the Ridgecrest/Dansville area of central Pinellas and in Tarpon Springs. These areas are currently underserved and have concentrations of indigent and working poor citizens who have difficulty accessing such care.
- Services provided will run the gamut of those offered in current locations in St. Petersburg: Well care, including checkups, immunizations and routine screening; treatment for minor illnesses which do not require hospitalization, including medications; dentistry for those whose health is affected by tooth and gum disease. It is hoped that early detection of disease will lead to more effective and less expensive treatment.

Improved access to well-care and primary medical care allows for a more cost effective health care delivery system and benefits in the long run by reducing unnecessary and inappropriate usage of hospital services. We also hope to identify and provide alternative care to those who consistently present at emergency rooms with non-emergent conditions.

This funding will allow for the maximization of existing resources, in keeping with the recommendation of our health care consultant. Further, contracting with a federally qualified health center will increase the county's ability to leverage current federal funding and may improve opportunities to receive federal appropriations in the future.