



#### THE KENT COUNTY PLANNING GRANT PROJECT

In September 2008 the Mid-Atlantic Association of Community Health Centers (MACHC) with the Kent County Local Management Board, received a federal planning grant from the Health Resources Services Administration (HRSA) to investigate developing a federally qualified community health center (FQHC) in the community. Current there are no FQHCs in Kent County, despite having a local need for community based health care services.

The purpose of Federally Qualified Health Centers is to improve the health status of underserved populations. For over 40 years, FQHCs have provided high-quality, affordable primary care and preventative services to our nation's most vulnerable populations. Some of their unique characteristics of community health centers that have contributed to their success are:

- Their services are open to all residents, regardless of a person's insurance status or ability to pay for services;
- FQHCs offer services that facilitate access to care such as outreach, case management, and eligibility assistance for public programs;
- FQHCs provide comprehensive, high quality primary health care that has been shown to reduce health disparities and improve patient outcomes;
- FQHCs are led by the patients they serve. FQHCs Board of Directors are comprised of at least 51% of patients – helping to ensure that the health center remains in touch with the community they serve;
- FQHCs provide services on a sliding-fee scale based upon a patient's family size and total income-ensuring that all people pay what they can afford for their health care; and

Since being awarded the grant MACHC and the LMB have worked to develop a comprehensive health needs assessment of Kent to identify the current health care needs, any gaps in health care, and issues residents may have accessing health care. Results of this assessment found the following:

- Nearly 30% of the county's entire population is low-income or living in poverty.
- Approximately 40% of Kent County has public health insurance such as Medicare and Medicaid. Another 15% have no form of health insurance.
- Uninsured patients, or self-pay patients, do not have accesses to adjustable fee scales to make payments for health care services affordable for their households.
- Very few primary care physicians in the county were accepting any new patients or patients with Medicaid at all.
- In surveys conducted with residents, nearly one-third of adults interviewed had an unmet primary care need in the past year, 40% of adults and 16% of children had an unmet dental care need in the year prior.

MACHC and the LMB have worked extensively with the local community to form a planning group. This group has met monthly since January, 2009. After carefully reviewing the needs assessment and learning more about the how to create a FQHC, the planning group has decided to work with Choptank Community Health System, Inc (CCHS) to create plans for a local center. CCHS is a FQHC that has a 30 year history of service to Eastern Shore residents. CCHS has service locations in Caroline, Talbot and Dorchester counties and is currently the medical home to over 20,000 individuals and families. The decision of the planning group to work with CCHS was based upon their record of success in working with communities to build a health center that reflects the needs of their residents.