



Alachua County Advisory Board Program

Health Care Advisory Board

Brendan Shortley, Chair
Bill Garst, Vice Chair

Dear Alachua County Board of County Commissioners,

The mission of the BOCC's Health Care Advisory Board is to identify specific gaps in health services, as well as develop strategies to address the needs. The topic of the continued financial viability of the CHOICES Healthcare Program Trust has been discussed for years at many levels, including most recently the BOCC and its Health Care Advisory Board.

The elimination of CHOICES funding will greatly impact our ability to help uninsured residents of Alachua County. These individuals have limited access to health care. And this program provides them needed cost-conscious health care, the alleviation of which was the impetus for the CHOICES program from inception. If we do not have this funding, these individuals would not have access to much needed health care services and preventive care. CHOICES has allowed untold value and true government support to the least fortunate among us.

-Some groups also use CHOICES dollars to leverage state funding and locally match dollars to the state through vehicles such as the Victims of Crime Act, etc. For example, the loss of this funding would reduce the availability of contracted trauma counseling to the domestic violence population in our community and likely increase this group, therefore increasing the City and County's financial burden in many respects (law enforcement, incarceration, social services, etc.).

-CHOICES funds significant dental efforts as well. Poor oral health leads to many community health issues (e.g. a burden on Alachua County Health Department funding, etc.), County commerce and the economy as a whole (e.g. the inability to interview and/or hold a job consistently while in constant pain), and County quality of life in-general.

-Nonprofit groups in the area of primary care allow us to identify chronic disease states like asthma, diabetes and hypertension, and treat these before they cause unwanted effects like stroke and death. Since this funding also includes much-needed psychiatric services, a viable argument can also be made that it is not cost-effective to have the police as the central receiving facility, the only two options being now a crisis stabilization facility, or jail. Frontline clinics that provide psychiatric services at GRACE and downtown (such as Helping Hands Clinic) greatly alleviate that financial burden to the County.

More information can also be found in research, such as the, "Return On Investment Of Public Health Interventions: A Systematic Review" in the Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health (<https://jech.bmj.com/content/71/8/827>).

In short, The CHOICES funds are being depleted at a rate of \$465,000 per year. We would request that the BOCC allot 10% per year from General Fund starting this year, increasing by 10% each year, as a supplement to the CHOICES funding available. This would create a sustainable base of funding for County's frontline of defense and prevention for the well-being of our community as a whole. Thank you for your time and admirable efforts.

Sincerely,

Brendan Shortley
Chair
Health Care Advisory Board