

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act Marks It's 100 Day Anniversary

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The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 provides a stimulus response to the current downturn within the economy. Enacted on February 17, 2009 by President Barack Obama, the ARRA provides a means of transparency and accountability that keeps Americans informed of how, when, and where their tax dollars are being spent. Led by a new Recovery Board, this act contains internal measures to ensure efficiency and necessary spending [1]. The ARRA totals \$787 billion and highlights key areas of the economy such as education and training, tax relief, infrastructure and science, state and local fiscal relief, protecting the vulnerable, energy, and healthcare [1]. Healthcare receives approximately \$150 billion in funds, which includes \$87 billion for Medicaid, \$24.7 billion to subsidize private health insurance for those who have lost their jobs, \$19.2 billion for health information technology, \$10 billion for the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and \$2 billion for community health centers.

Thursday, May 28, 2009 marked the 100 day anniversary of the enactment of The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. To recognize this anniversary, Secretary of U.S. Health and Human Services (HHS) Kathleen Sebelius, highlighted the progress made in the first 100 days, and discussed the ARRA's emphasis on community health centers. The ARRA assigns \$2 billion in grant funding to health centers over a two year period. In this grant, \$500 million will support new health center sites and service areas, increase services at existing sites, and concentrate on rises in uninsured populations. The remaining \$1.5 billion will be utilized to support construction, and renovation and equipment. Health information technology systems in health centers and health center controlled networks will also be included within this allocation. In her address, Secretary Sebelius also announced the release of \$81.7 million to expand services offered at the nation's health centers, which last year provided more than 17 million families with comprehensive, high quality and family orientated primary health care [3].

Secretary Sebelius further highlights the importance of health centers, notably for the uninsured:

“The economic downturn is hurting all of us and when workers lose their jobs, they often lose their health insurance, too. Community health centers provide essential care for families across the country that do not have insurance or cannot afford the high cost of care. The Recovery Act grants and the funding we have released are key investments that will help deliver care to millions of Americans” [3].

Currently, the HHS has awarded 126 community health centers approximately \$150 million in Recovery Act grant funds. More than 750,000 individuals will be provided with access to healthcare with this allocation of grants. In addition, HHS has allotted \$338 million in Increased Demand for Services grants for health centers. These funds will provide care to more than 2 million additional patients in health centers over the next two years, including approximately 1 million uninsured individuals. Furthermore, within two years, health centers will utilize these funds to generate and maintain roughly 6,500 health center jobs [3].

Despite the increasing number of uninsured individuals in the United States, the ARRA's allocation of funds to community health centers can hopefully provide relief, as well as quality care, to those who do not have health insurance.

Sources:

[1] <http://www.recovery.gov/>

[2] <http://content.nejm.org/cgi/content/full/360/11/1057#T1>

[3] <http://www.hhs.gov/news/press/2009pres/05/20090528a.html>