

**Testimony**  
**House Bill 1553**  
**House Education Committee**  
**Representative Pat D. Heinert, Chair**  
February 10, 2025

Dear Chairman Heinert, Vice Chairman Schrieber-Beck, and members of the committee:

On behalf of Community HealthCare Association of the Dakotas (CHAD) and our member community health centers in North Dakota, we ask for your support of HB 1553.

CHAD is a non-profit membership organization that serves as the Primary Care Association for North Dakota and South Dakota, supporting community health centers across both states in their efforts to provide health care to underserved and low-income populations. The health centers we represent have locations in both urban and rural communities (see map on page 2).

Community health centers (CHCs) are non-profit, community-driven primary care clinics that serve all individuals, regardless of their insurance status or ability to pay. North Dakota is home to five community health center organizations that provide comprehensive, integrated care to more than 36,000 individuals at 22 locations in 20 communities across the state. Sixteen percent of those patients are uninsured and about 40 percent have family incomes below the federal poverty level.

The community health center integrated care model includes primary care, behavioral health and substance use treatment, dental care, pharmacy services, and a range of case management services that can include help with transportation, finding community resources, or assistance with insurance and financial enrollments. Health centers are essential medical homes where patients find services that promote health, diagnose and treat disease, manage chronic conditions and disabilities, and overcome barriers that prevent them from getting healthy and staying healthy.

CHAD and our members recognize that many factors contribute to a person's overall health. Access to health care is important, but socioeconomic factors such as access to nutritious food play a significant role as well, especially for school aged children. We also know that food insecurity disproportionately affects children from low-income homes.

Community health centers see firsthand the food and nutrition security needs across our state. In fact, screening data from North Dakota health centers show that food insecurity is the 3rd highest need across the fourteen social determinants of health in 2023. Through a partnership



Community HealthCare Association of the Dakotas

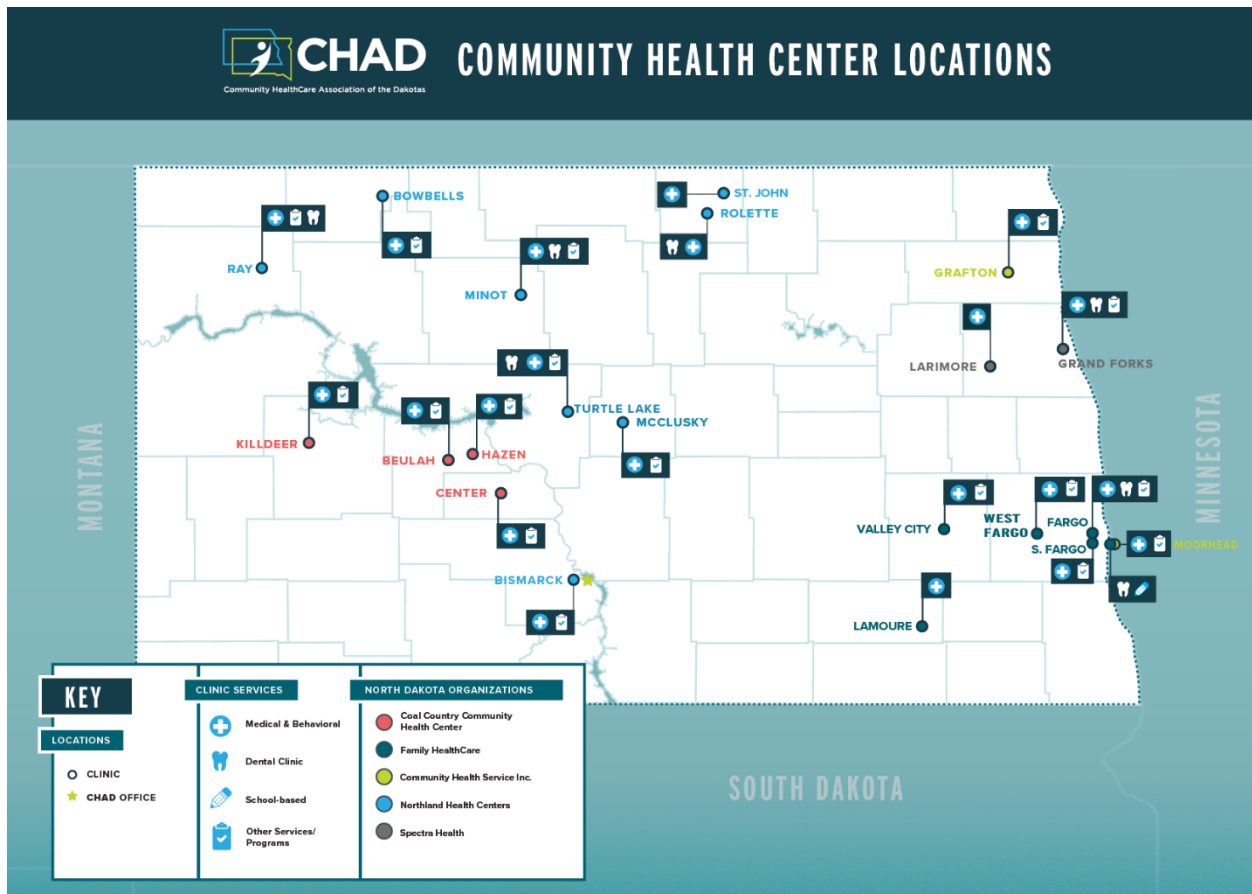
with the food bank, community health centers in North Dakota are identifying food needs during the primary care visit and distributing food to patients in need during clinic visits. Still, the need for greater food security in communities remains.

We support efforts to create more sustainable access to healthy food and remove cost barriers for families and individuals. We know there are many policy levers to address food insecurity, and we support this critical discussion.

Please support school meals for all children in our state by supporting HB 1553 with a do pass recommendation.

Thank you for your consideration,

Shannon Bacon  
Director of External Affairs  
Community HealthCare Association of the Dakotas



196 E. 6<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 200, Sioux Falls, SD 57104 | 216 N 2<sup>nd</sup> Street, Suite 104, Bismarck, ND 58501

Phone: (605) 275-2423 | Phone: (701) 221-9824

[www.communityhealthcare.net](http://www.communityhealthcare.net)