

# **A Concise History of the “Community Health Center Movement”**

**Southern Arizona AHEC**

**May 8, 2026 El Rio Health, Tucson**

**Jonathan Melk MD FAAP, Chief Executive Officer**

*Foremost...*

Thank You

for inviting me!



# CHIRICAHUA

COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTERS, INC.

HEALTH FOR ALL

A few facts...

Chiricahua  
Community Health  
Centers, Inc.

=

“Chiricahua”



**CHIRICAHUA**

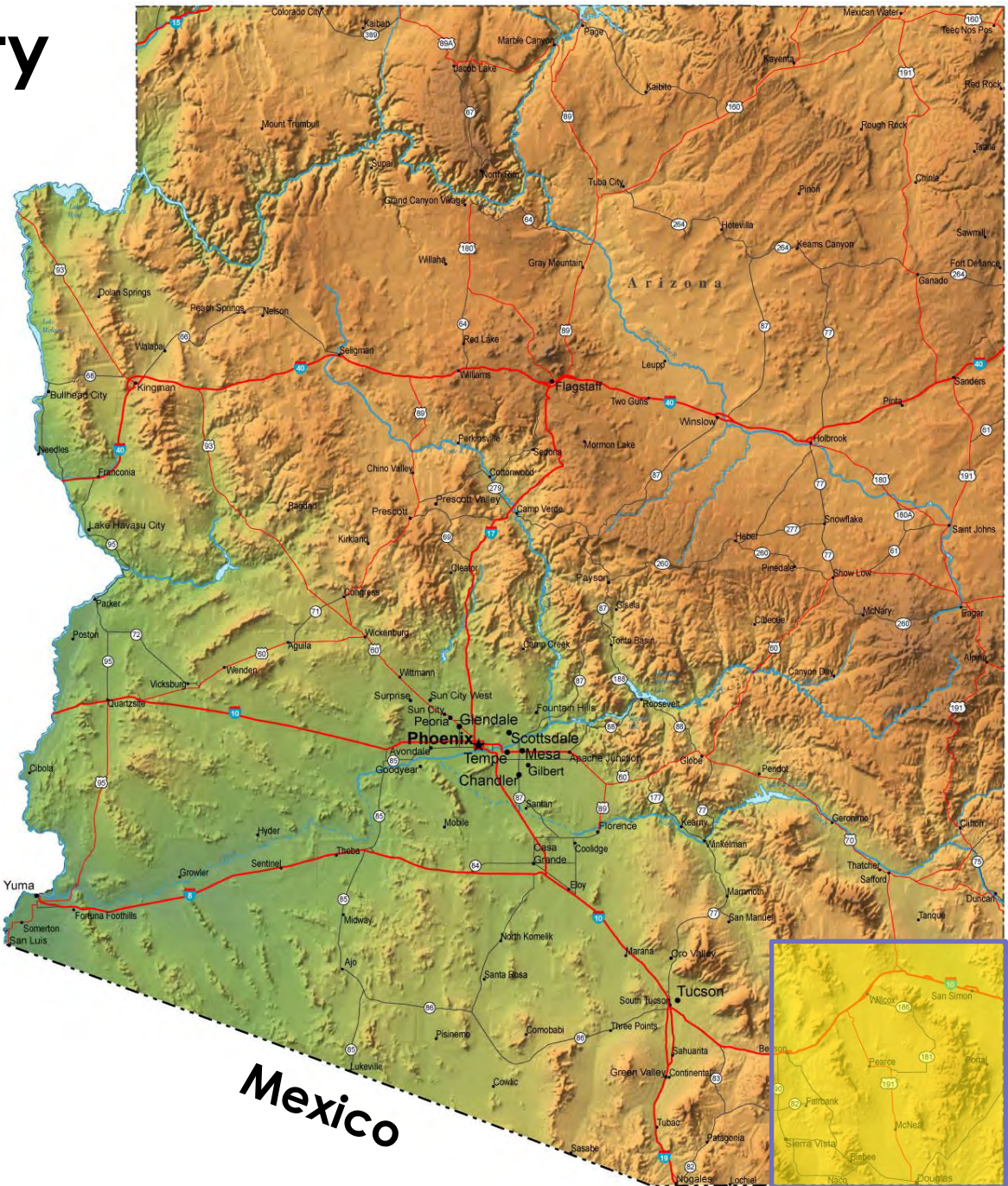
COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTERS, INC.

HEALTH FOR ALL

30 Years Old



# Cochise County "Our Square"



New Mexico



**1,951 miles**

**100**



# Cochise County



# Cochise County



**6,225 square miles**

**Rhode Island + Connecticut**

**~125 k people**







# Check Points

U.S.  
BORDER PATROL

Gain Valuable Skills...  
Join the Army Reserve



U.S. ARMY

ARMY STRONG.®

[www.goarmy.com/reserve](http://www.goarmy.com/reserve)

You've Found # 11  
Call 888-764-ARMY (2769)

KEEP A SAFE DISTANCE

# Cochise County



# Cochise County



# Cochise County





# Cochise County

# Cochise County



# MAJOR CHALLENGES

- 1) Shortage of professionals
- 2) Distance to hospitals & specialists
- 3) Poverty
- 4) Stigma

**UNDERINSURED**

**UNINSURED**

**How do we address  
these challenges?**

# Endless Innovation & Determination



11 clinics 4 mobiles

--Teamwork--

~80 providers

400+ employees

~35 k patients

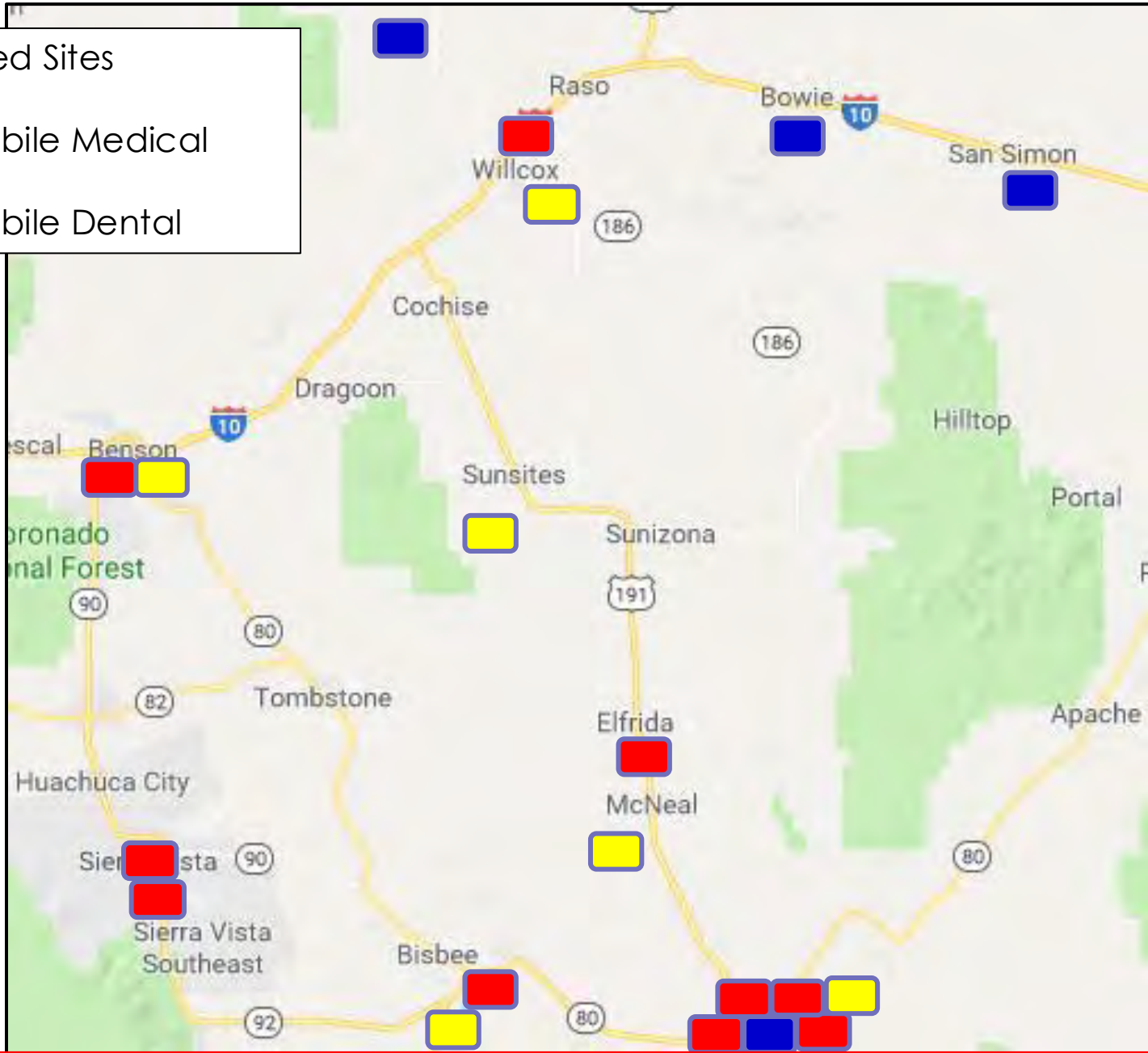
(50%/50% adult/children ~30% of population)

~150 k visits/yr.

Fixed Sites

Mobile Medical

Mobile Dental



MEXICO

We believe that  
living a rural/border  
life should

**NOT**

mean living a  
shorter life.

Mission Driven  
& deep believers in the  
“*Community Health  
Center Movement*”

# Community Health = Health Care + Public Health



# “Community Health Center Movement”

# Community Health Centers

A Movement  
and the People  
Who Made  
It Happen



Bonnie Lefkowitz

# H. Jack Geiger MD



# Global Health Rotation to South Africa





Adobe Stock | #36995614





**1950s:**

# **Civil Rights Movement**

***“Of all the forms of inequality,  
injustice in health care  
is the most shocking  
and inhumane.”***

Martin Luther King Jr.

**WE SERVE  
WHITE'S *only*  
NO  
SPANISH *or* MEXICANS**

**WAITING ROOM  
FOR WHITE ONLY**  
→  
**BY ORDER  
POLICE DEPT.**

**NO** **DOGS  
NEGROES  
MEXICANS**  
LONESTAR RESTAURANT ASSN.  
Dallas, Texas



# MISSING CALL FBI

THE FBI IS SEEKING INFORMATION CONCERNING THE DISAPPEARANCE AT PHILADELPHIA, MISSISSIPPI, OF THESE THREE INDIVIDUALS ON JUNE 21, 1964. EXTENSIVE INVESTIGATION IS BEING CONDUCTED TO LOCATE GOODMAN, CHANEY; AND SCHWERNER, WHO ARE DESCRIBED AS FOLLOWS:

**ANDREW GOODMAN**



**JAMES EARL CHANEY**



**MICHAEL HENRY SCHWERNER**



# 1964 Civil Rights Act



**Economic Opportunity Act of 1964**



**Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO)**

# **Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO)**

**Created to administer President Johnson’s “War on Poverty” and “Great Society” programs**

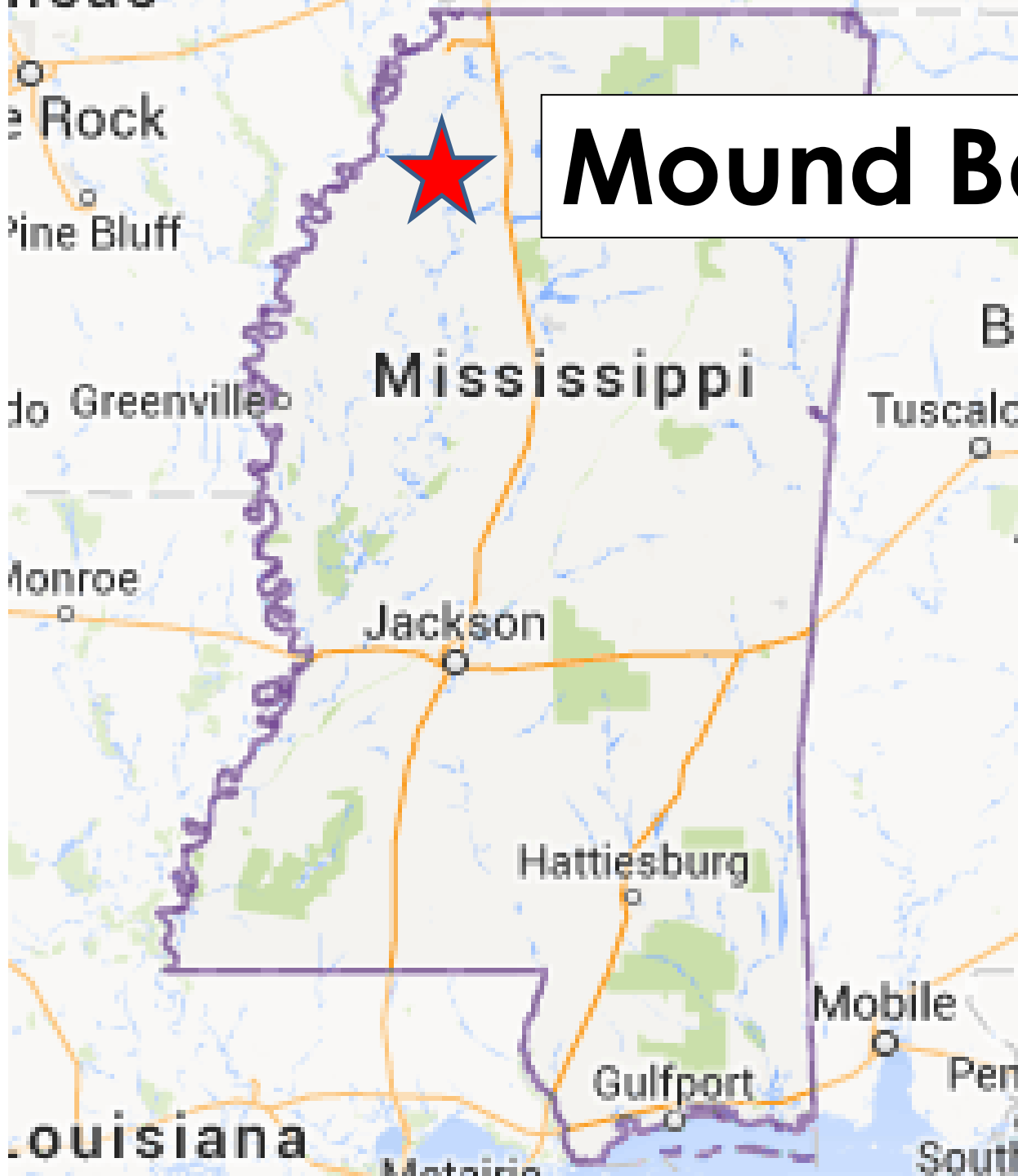
**Mission was to provide “the opportunity for education and training, the opportunity to work, and the opportunity to live in decency and dignity”**

# Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO)

- Job Corps
- Head Start
- Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA)
- **Community Health Centers**

H. Jack Geiger MD





# Mound Bayou



# Mound Bayou

# Ross Barnett,

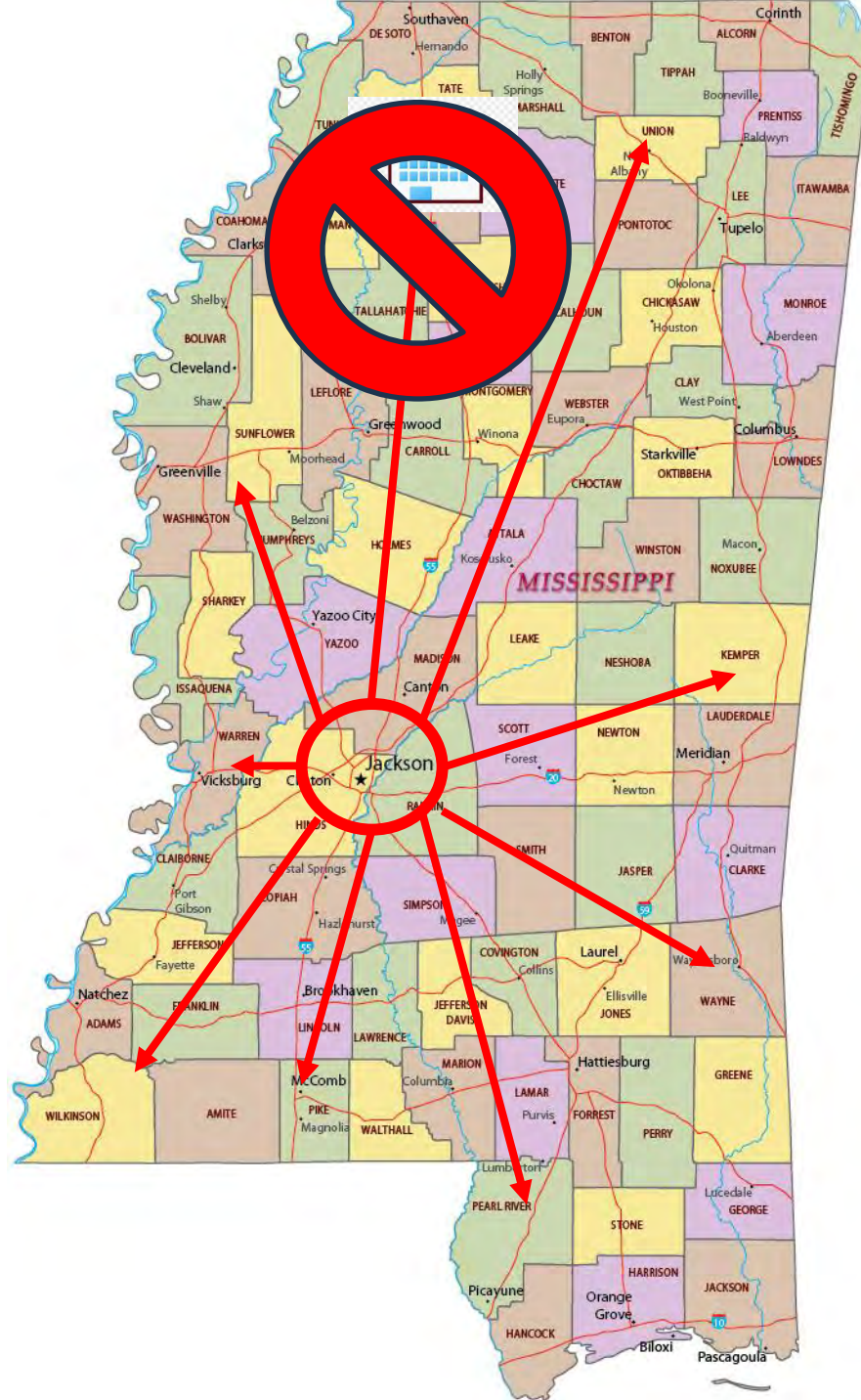
## Mississippi governor 1960 - 1964



"There is no case in history where the Caucasian race has survived social integration. We will not drink from the cup of genocide."

**BLOCK GRANTS = DC → States**





# Ross Barnett,

## Mississippi governor 1960 - 1964



"There is no case in history where the Caucasian race has survived social integration. We will not drink from the cup of genocide."



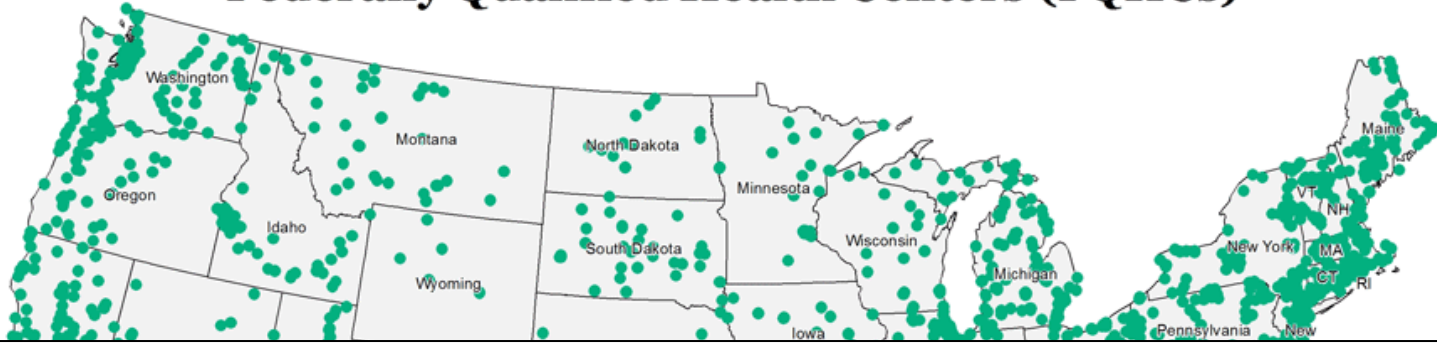
# Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO)



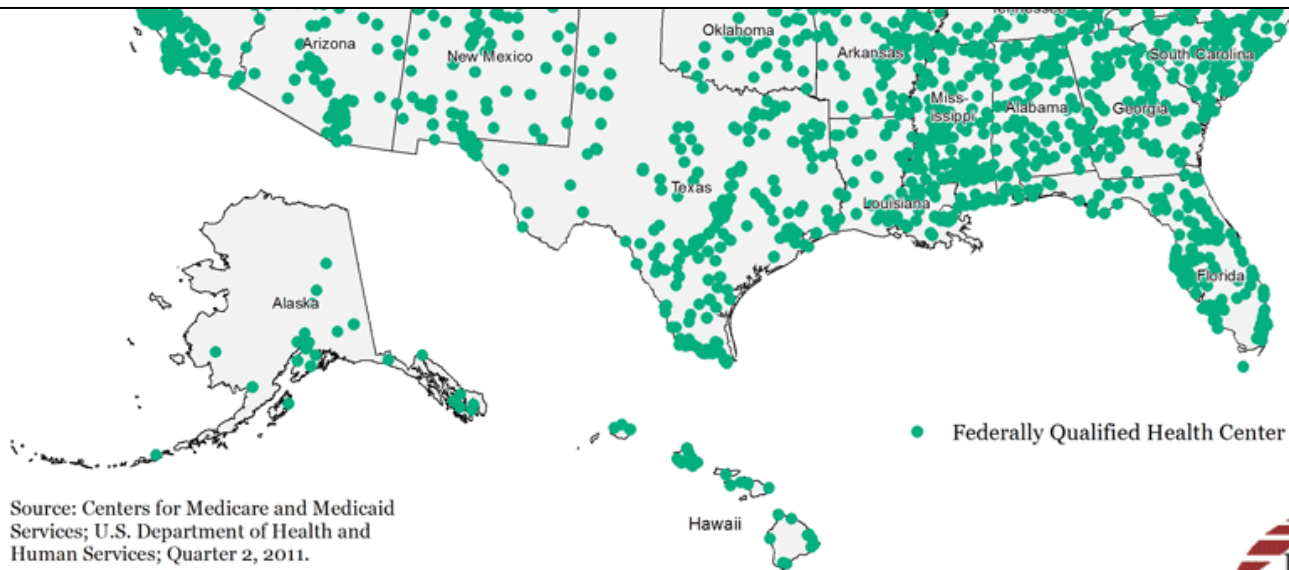
# Delta Health Center



## Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs)



Serve 34+ million people



Source: Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; Quarter 2, 2011.

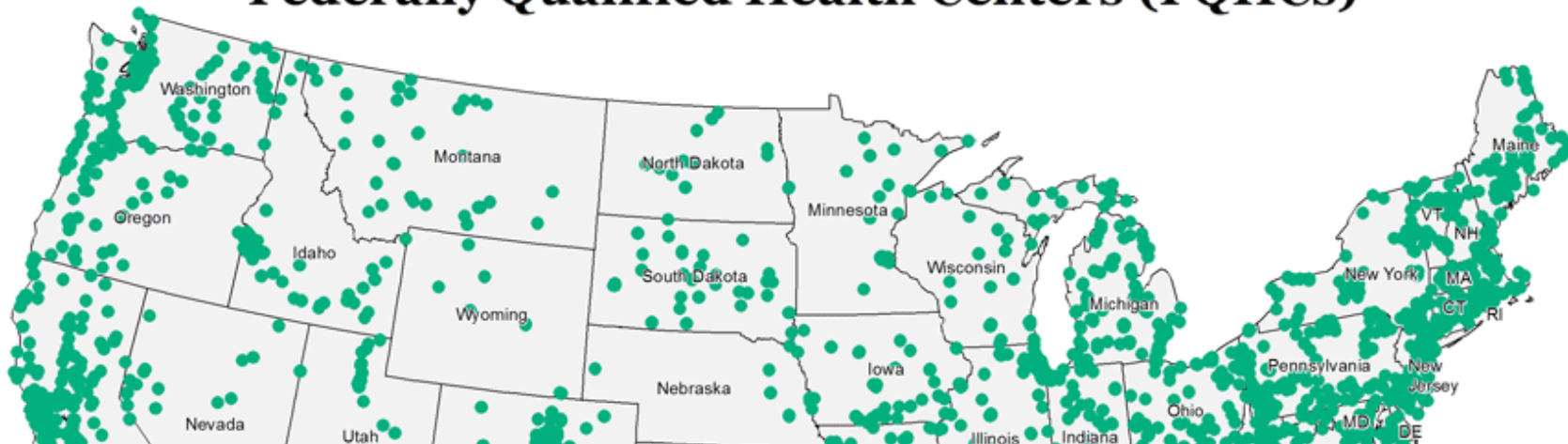
Note: Alaska and Hawaii not shown to scale



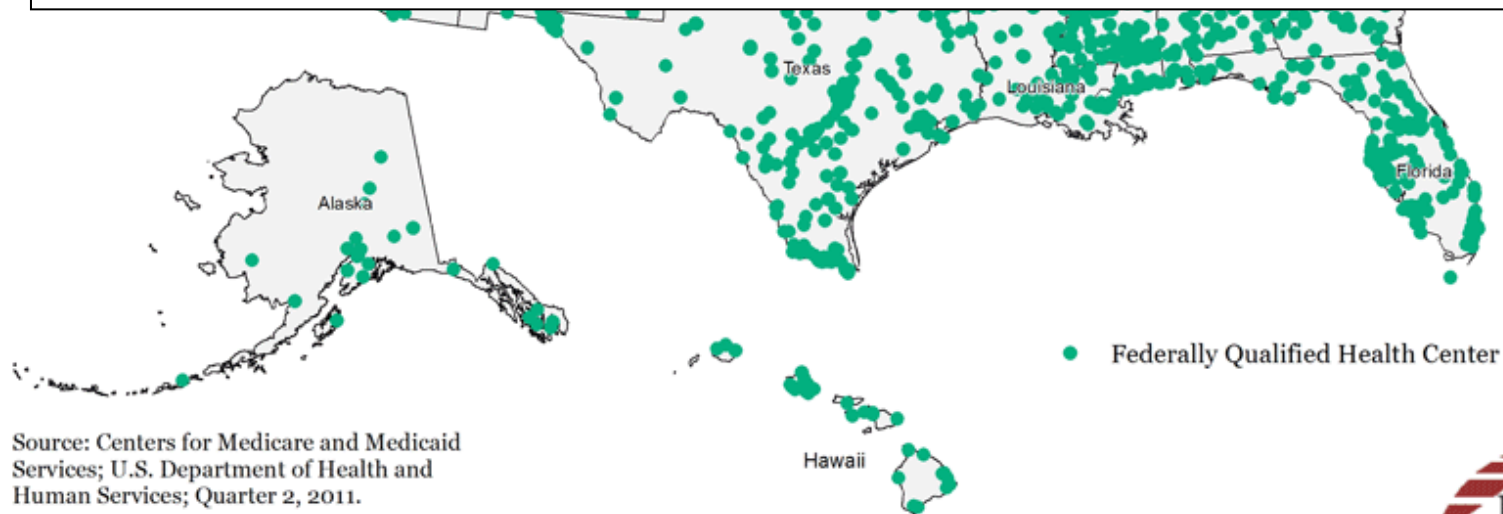
# Medical School Rotation to South Africa



# Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs)



All receive federal grants\*,  
with six major requirements:



Source: Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; Quarter 2, 2011.

Note: Alaska and Hawaii not shown to scale

# Health Center Program Fundamentals



## Serve High Need Areas

- Must serve a high need community or population (e.g., HPSA, MUA/P)



## Patient Directed

- Private non-profit or public agency that is governed by a patient-majority community board



## Comprehensive

- Provide comprehensive primary care and enabling services (e.g., education, outreach, and transportation services)



## No One is Turned Away

- Services are available to all, with fees adjusted based upon ability to pay



## Collaborative

- Collaborate with other community providers to maximize resources and efficiencies in service delivery



## Accountable

- Meet performance and accountability requirements regarding administrative, clinical, and financial operations



The Health Center Program is authorized under Section 330 of the Public Health Service (PHS) Act.



“Never doubt that a small group  
of thoughtful, committed  
people can change the world.

Indeed, it is the only thing  
that ever has.”

Margaret Mead

## Students & Residents...



“I wanted to thank and all the providers from Chiricahua for your time and willingness to teach me. You have left my understanding of medicine and the role of physicians in the world forever changed. You set such a wonderful example of the kind of human being I strive to be. My respect and admiration are of the highest for you and your colleagues.”

**If you are dreaming about  
practicing “global health”...**

**you should commit to  
doing it...**

**and then just do it.**

# Thank You!



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