

WASHINGTON (26 March) – The National Association of Community Health Centers (NACHC), one of the nation's leading healthcare advocacy organizations, today named U.S. Rep. Gus Bilirakis (R-Fla.) a '2009 Distinguished Community Health Center Superhero' for his efforts to improve access to quality and affordable health services for uninsured and medically underserved people.

"Health care costs too much today, especially when the cost of everything else has increased significantly," said Bilirakis. "Faced with the skyrocketing costs of health care and the scarcity of health insurance for millions of Americans, strengthening community health centers is one of the most cost effective ways to help address inadequacies in our country's health care system."

Earlier this week Bilirakis circulated a letter to the committee in Congress that provides funding for health centers asking its leaders to provide \$2.6 billion for the Health Centers program this upcoming year to allow further expansions in the future. This funding will allow community health centers to continue reducing health care disparities, managing chronic illnesses, improving birth outcomes, and improving the health and well being of those they serve, regardless of their ability to pay.

Bilirakis has been a tireless champion for community health centers both in Florida and throughout the country, focusing on ways to maximize the effectiveness of federal grant dollars used for community health services to better incorporate health centers into America's medical network.

Community health centers are non-profit, community-owned health care providers serving low income and medically underserved communities. The centers provided high-quality, affordable primary care and preventive services for millions of Americans regardless of their insurance status or ability to pay. Their costs of care rank among the lowest, and they reduce the need for more expensive in-patient and specialty care, saving billions of dollars for taxpayers. Currently, there are over 1,100 Community, Migrant and Homeless health centers serving millions of low-income children and adults in over 5,000 communities nationwide.