

Community health centers key in care of poor, official says

By JESSE GARZA
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Community health-care centers must continue to lead the way toward getting quality care to the poor and disadvantaged, US Assistant Surgeon General Marilyn Hughes Gaston told an audience of local health care providers Wednesday.

Gaston's remarks came at a luncheon hosted by the Sixteenth Street Community Health Center, 1032 S. 16th St., as part of Gaston's tour of Milwaukee's community health-care centers.

"You as board chairs and executive directors must be the voices for the disenfranchised," said Gaston, who serves as the head of the US Bureau of Primary Health Care. "You must continue to advocate for them."

Gaston cited data from the National Center for Health Statistics at the Centers for Disease

Control and Prevention that showed higher rates of preventable death among minority populations.

Gaston said many of these deaths stem from high instances of infant mortality, breast cancer, substance abuse and homicide in central city communities.

"These are preventable causes of death," she said. "These issues really reflect poverty."

Gaston praised efforts of the local community health-care providers, saying Milwaukee serves as an example of a strong partnership between community health centers and a city health department.

"As a nation, we need to look at models that work," Gaston said. "I'm impressed by the linkages and networking I see here between community-based providers, the Health Department, legislatures and health maintenance organizations."