

## Health Care Access Disparity Programs

**Primary Care Program.** The Wisconsin Primary Care Program in the Division of Public Health assesses the need for primary care and dental and mental health care providers, using federal criteria to define shortage. These criteria include high levels of poverty and infant mortality, and a shortage of health care providers. Many of the shortage areas in Wisconsin are urban communities with concentrations of minority populations: African American, American Indian, and Hispanic/Latino. Shortage areas with high levels of need may be eligible for National Health Service Corps assignees and loan repayment candidates, as well as state loan repayment candidates. The shortage designation also helps retain existing providers by enhancing payment levels from Medicaid and Medicare.

A federal initiative for improving access to regular preventive services is “Take Your Loved One to the Doctor Day,” sponsored by the federal Office of Minority Health (OMS). The initiative targets racial and ethnic minorities and is unveiled each September. Advocates, health care organizations, and health professionals can sign up on the OMS Web site each year to become a local partner.

A hallmark of good access is providing services in a culturally and linguistically sensitive manner. As populations in Wisconsin become more diverse, health care providers must interact with patients from many different backgrounds. Culture and language are factors in how health care services are delivered and received. Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) guidelines issued by the federal Office of Minority Health have the potential to improve access to and quality of care toward improved health outcomes. The federal Agency on Healthcare Research and Quality also sponsored a literature review that outlines the specific benefits of cultural competence.