

## Health Clinics Win Battle to Stay Open

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Dr. Karen DeSalvo of Tulane received accolades on Wednesday (Sept. 22) from New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu for being a front runner in the successful effort to secure funds that will keep a network of local health clinics open for uninsured patients.



Dr. Karen DeSalvo of Tulane, left, speaks at a news conference announcing continuation of a network of community health clinics in New Orleans that provide care to needy patients. Sharing the good news are state health secretary Bruce Greenstein, center, and New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu. (Photo by Ryan Rivet)

Landrieu and state officials announced that an agreement was reached between the city, state and federal governments to preserve the community clinic network through fund matching and a special waiver.

In order to keep the clinics open after the current \$100 million grant expires at the end of this month, DeSalvo explained that a request had to be made from state government to waive Medicaid rules that restrict those funds to be used only for hospital-based care. She is chair of 504HealthNet, a consortium of community health providers, and vice dean of [community affairs and health policy](#) at Tulane.

The network of 87 primary care clinics was developed after Hurricane Katrina devastated the region's healthcare infrastructure.

"The reason this really matters is because typically there is no other way to pay for uninsured people and in Louisiana we have a lot more uninsured adults than other states," said DeSalvo. "We have very strict Medicaid rules, and very few insurance companies provide private insurance."

A factor in having the waiver approved was the support shown in fund matching by local and state governments. Earlier this month, Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal and Landrieu announced their commitment of \$30 million over three years as the state's match, coming from administrative funds in a Community Development Block Grant.

Of the 87 clinics, Tulane University physicians and medical students provide care at eight sites. Tulane is one of 25 organizations involved in helping to run the matrix of clinics, which has served nearly 300,000 New Orleans residents since Katrina.

"Every Tulane medical student at some point works in one of these clinics during their experience here," said DeSalvo. "We have opportunities for public health students, social work students and some of our undergraduate students to get involved through service learning."

Thanks to the agreement, low-income and uninsured residents will continue to have access to this network of clinics regardless of their ability to pay.

Landrieu said, "This network is a national model and is just one of the ways post-Katrina New Orleans is serving as a true laboratory of reform."