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Study finds financial benefits for state through providing primary care

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A coalition of primary health care providers in New York has released a study showing that "hundreds of millions" of taxpayer dollars could be saved if a larger emphasis were placed on delivering primary care to the underserved.

The report, entitled "Laying the Foundation: Health System Reform in New York State and the Primary Care Imperative," was commissioned by the Community Health Care Association of New York State, the **Primary Care Development Corp.** and the New York State Area Health Education Center System. It was researched and written by a team at the **George Washington University School of Public Health and Health Services.**

The report concludes that bolstering primary care will result in lower costs, better health outcomes and reduced health disparities among the state's residents. It noted that costs associated with treating New York Medicaid beneficiaries who were community health center patients were 24 percent less than for those who were not. Among people suffering from diabetes, costs were 36 percent lower. A 2004 national report found New York spending more than \$1.1 billion on unnecessary emergency room visits, because four-fifths of those visits could have been treated in a primary care setting.

The coalition, which has the support of Richard Gottfried (D-New York City), chairman of the **State Assembly Health Committee**, is hoping to get its message across to the **State Commission on Health Care Facilities** in the 21st Century, the group charged with overhauling the state's health care system. So far, the commission has focused most of its efforts on "rightsizing" the industry through possible closings of hospitals and nursing homes.

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