

May 15, 2023

The Honorable Bernie Sanders
Chair
Health, Education, Labor, & Pensions Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bill Cassidy, M.D.
Ranking Member
Health, Education, Labor, & Pensions Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Chair
Energy and Commerce Committee
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Frank Pallone, Jr.
Ranking Member
Energy and Commerce Committee
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Sanders and Ranking Member Cassidy and Chair McMorris Rodgers and Ranking Member Pallone:

We the undersigned, including national health care organizations, state primary care associations, and community health centers, write today to urge you to increase funding for federally qualified health centers (FQHCs) as part of the Community Health Center Fund reauthorization, which must pass by September 30, 2023.

We are grateful for the steadfast bipartisan support that Congress has provided to FQHCs over the years. While we recognize the complex dynamics surrounding federal funding conversations on Capitol Hill this year, enacting flat funding as part of the Community Health Center Fund reauthorization will compound an already dire financial situation for health centers across the country. In today's health care economy, flat funding amounts to a cut. Without an increase, patient care and access will suffer. Funding in the reauthorization should keep up with inflation, if not match the increases contained in President's FY24 budget.

Federal FQHC funding will help provide a comprehensive medical home for all patients, especially those in underserved communities. Health centers work tirelessly to meet the complex and evolving needs of their patients, serving all who seek care, regardless of their insurance status or ability to pay. With the right investment, FQHCs can fulfill their mission as hyper-local health care hubs, treating the full range of complex patient needs and helping entire communities live healthier and more productive lives.

For example, FQHCs help patients manage conditions like diabetes and hypertension; by managing these conditions, health centers keep patients out of the emergency room, preventing life-threatening and expensive complications. Health centers also provide cancer screenings and other preventive services and address mental health care and substance abuse disorders, among many other critical services. They do so at a lower cost than other primary care providers, and they provide billions of dollars in proven downstream savings to the health care system as a whole.

FQHCs served over 30 million patients in 2021, a 43 percent increase over the past 10 years. One in five patients are from rural areas; almost 400,000 patients are veterans; 63 percent of patients identify as a racial/ethnic minority; and ninety percent of patients have incomes at or below 200 percent of the

federal poverty level. We expect the number of patients utilizing health centers to increase to an estimated 40 million by 2030.

Unfortunately, while striving to meet the mission of serving this diverse patient population, FQHCs are facing dire fiscal challenges. FQHC budgets will shrink in 2023 due to the ending of several sources of funding and fiscal pressures within other programs. Simply put, FQHCs cannot continue to provide the level of service that patients need without an increase in funding.

This is particularly important as challenges to access to care continue to mount and the need for community health center services continues to rise. For example, 15 million people could lose their Medicaid coverage through the redetermination process taking place as the public health emergency ends; some will remain without insurance, and health centers will continue to provide them care regardless of their ability to pay. But, without adequate funding to cover the cost of providing this care, health centers cannot withstand the financial turmoil or shortfalls they are currently facing.

FQHCs are also responding to the growing health care access crisis in rural areas, particularly as rural hospitals close. Additionally, FQHCs are one of the nation's most important access points for quality behavioral health care; overall, the number of FQHC visits for mental health issues rose by 19 percent from 2019 to 2021, a figure that is predicted to continue to climb. These are just a few of the increasing needs that cannot be met if health centers do not have the funding to provide necessary services.

For these reasons, we urge Congress to increase funding for federally qualified health centers as part of the Community Health Center Fund reauthorization. For more information or to discuss this further, please direct your staff to contact Stephanie Krenrich, SVP for Policy and Government Affairs at Advocates for Community Health, at skrenrich@advocatesforcommunityhealth.org.

Sincerely,

National Organizations:

Advocates for Community Health
American Diabetes Association
American Heart Association
American Lung Association
Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations (AAPCHO)
Association of Clinicians for the Underserved (ACU)
CancerCare
Capital Link
Catholic Health Association of the United States
Epilepsy Foundation
Families USA
Fight Colorectal Cancer
First Focus Campaign for Children
Health Choice Network
Hemophilia Federation of America
Medicaid Health Plans of America
National Health Care for the Homeless Council
National Health Council
National Patient Advocate Foundation

National Rural Health Association
OCHIN
Prevent Cancer Foundation

State and Local Organizations:

Alabama:

Alabama Primary Health Care Association

Alaska:

Alaska Primary Care Association
Kodiak Community Health Center

Arizona:

Adelante Healthcare
Arizona Alliance for Community Health Centers
Chiricahua Community Health Centers, Inc
El Rio Health
Marana Health Center Healthcare
Mountain Park Health Center
Sun Life Health
Terros Health

California:

Alameda Health Consortium
Anderson Valley Health Center
Camarena Health
Community Clinic Association of Los Angeles County
Community Medical Centers, Inc.
Family HealthCare Network
Health Alliance of Northern California
Hill Country Community Clinic
LifeLong Medical Care
Long Valley Health Center
Mendocino Coast Clinics, Inc.
North Coast Clinics Network
North East Medical Services (NEMS)
Northeast Valley Health Corporation
Northeastern Rural Health Clinics
Open Door Community Health Centers
Redwood Coast Medical Services
San Ysidro Health
Shasta Cascade Health Centers
Shasta Community Health Center
Shingletown Medical Center
T.H.E. Health and Wellness Centers
Venice Family Clinic

Connecticut:

Community Health Center Association of Connecticut
Generations Family Health Center, Inc.
Norwalk Community Health Center

Delaware:

Mid-Atlantic Association of Community Health Centers

District of Columbia:

Unity Health Care

Florida:

Citrus Health Network, Inc
Community Health Centers of Pinellas DBA Evara Health
Evara Health
Florida Association of Community Health Centers
Florida Community Health Centers, Inc.
FoundCare
Jessie Trice Community Health System, Inc.
Miami Beach Community Health Center
Orange Blossom Family Health
Premier Community HealthCare Group, Inc.
Rural Health Care, Inc. d/b/a Aza Health
Suncoast Community Health Centers, Inc.
Tampa Family Health Center, Inc.

Georgia:

CareConnect Health, Inc.
Curtis V Cooper Primary Health Care, Inc
Georgia Highlands Medical Services
Georgia Primary Care Association
Health, Education, Assessment, and Leadership, Inc.
Medlink Georgia, Inc.
Palmetto Health Council, Inc. D/B/A YourTown Health
Valley Healthcare System

Illinois:

SIHF Healthcare

Kansas:

Salina Health Education Foundation

Kentucky:

Kentucky Primary Care Association

Maine:

Islands Community Medical Services
Maine Primary Care Association

Penobscot Community Health Care
Portland Community Health Center

Maryland:

Maryland Community Health System
Mid-Atlantic Association of Community Health Centers
Owensville Primary Care, Inc d/b/a Bay Community Health

Massachusetts:

East Boston Neighborhood Health Center

Mississippi:

ARcare d/b/a MississippiCare
Community Health Center Association of Mississippi

Missouri:

Jordan Valley Community Health Center

New Hampshire:

Ammonoosuc Community Health Services, Inc. (ACHS)
Amoskeag Health
Bi-State Primary Care Association
Coos County Family Health Services
Harbor Care
Lamprey Health Care
Mid-State Health Center
White Mountain Community Health Center

New Mexico:

Presbyterian Medical Services

New York:

Morris Heights Health Center
Sun River Health

Ohio:

Community Health & Wellness Partners of Logan County

Oregon:

Oregon Primary Care Association
Yakima Valley Farm Workers Clinic

Rhode Island:

Rhode Island Health Center Association
Thundermist Health Center

Tennessee:

Cherokee Health Systems

Tennessee Primary Care Association

Texas:

Heart of Texas Community Health Center
Legacy Community Health
Lone Star Circle of Care

Utah:

Association for Utah Community Health
Carbon Medical Service Association, Inc.
Community Health Centers, Inc
Southwest Utah Community Health Center - Family Healthcare
Midtown Community Health Center, Inc.

Vermont:

Bi-State Primary Care Association
Community Health Centers of Burlington
Community Health Centers of the Rutland Region
Gifford Health Care
Lamoille Health Partners
Little Rivers Health Care
Northern Counties Health Care
Northern Tier Center for Health (Notch)

Virginia:

Central Virginia Health Services, Inc.
Community Access Network
Daily Planet Health Services
Eastern Shore Rural Health System, Inc.
Healthy Community Health Centers
Peninsula Institute for Community Health
Stony Creek Community Health Center
Virginia Community Healthcare Association

Washington:

Columbia Basin Health Association
Neighborcare Health
Peninsula Community Health Services
Yakima Valley Farm Workers Clinic