Snapshot:
Health Centers Disproportionately Serve Patients with Costly Chronic Conditions

Hypertension, diabetes, depression, and asthma are some of America’s most burdensome chronic conditions, costing the US health care system an estimated $200 billion, $174 billion, $83 billion, and $56 billion a year respectively. These chronic conditions disproportionately affect Americans of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds and of lower socioeconomic status, populations that make up the vast majority of health centers’ patient populations. Due to their high prevalence and high costs, these conditions are considered priorities for action by Healthy People 2020 and the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ).

Diabetes, hypertension, depression, and asthma are the most commonly seen chronic illnesses at health centers. Health centers serve large volumes of these patients and also disproportionately serve more patients with these chronic conditions than other providers (Figure 1).

Despite the complexity of serving at-risk patients with a high burden of chronic illness, health centers provide high quality chronic care that meets or exceeds national practice standards, improves outcomes and reduces complications, and generates savings through effective care management and prevention. Overall, health centers save the health care system $24 billion annually.