

# FROM THE CHAIR

Dear Colleague:

The NACHC Policy and Issues Forum in March set us off to a grand start in recognizing the 50th Anniversary of the Community Health Center Program this year. More than 2,500 health center leaders, State/Regional Primary Care Association and Health Center Controlled Network representatives, program partners and guests joined in the celebration to mark the success of a program that has opened the doors of healthcare for millions of Americans over the past five decades.

Everyone had their story to tell — about how a demonstration project of the War on Poverty beat the odds to become the largest primary care network in America, today serving 23 million people across the country, and on the path toward serving as many as 28 million by year's end. Panel discussions led by health center pioneers, including founder Dr. Jack Geiger, retraced the history and our long journey overcoming obstacles and challenges in the effort to build a community-based health system reaching out to the medically underserved and uninsured, low-income working families, and high-risk and vulnerable populations.

Guest speakers such as labor leader Dolores Huerta, anti-poverty activist Peter Edelman, health economist Karen Davis, former Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle and others spoke to the breadth of the Health Center Movement that enlisted the support of grassroots organizations, the greater healthcare, academic and research communities and the public/private sectors in the quest to bring greater equity into the healthcare system. Moreover, we were honored by tributes and messages from former Presidents George W. Bush and Jimmy Carter, Administration officials, and current and retired lawmakers from both political parties. All praised the leadership of the men and women whose dedicated work at health centers has moved our nation toward better health and quality and savings in healthcare.

For all of us, the celebration was a proud moment in time. It renewed spirits to keep to the tasks ahead as we lay the groundwork for the next 50 years. We recognize there is much more we can be doing to meet greater community health needs and to help remove barriers to care for the many still excluded from the nation's health system. To that end, our journey continues as we advocate for stable and sustained public investment to ensure growth into the future and as we spur even greater innovation and effectiveness in healthcare delivery.

Throughout the remainder of the year, we will continue to celebrate our 50th Anniversary at upcoming NACHC events. I urge you to take the opportunity throughout the year to speak out and communicate the tremendous value of a program that has strengthened and improved lives all across America.

Sincerely,

*Gary M. Wiltz, MD*

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Chair of the Board  
National Association of Community Health Centers



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