



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF  
Community Health Centers

September 27, 2018

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Senate Majority Leader  
317 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer  
Senate Minority Leader  
322 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Paul Ryan  
Speaker of the United States House of  
Representatives  
1233 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Minority Leader of the United States House of  
Representatives  
233 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senators McConnell and Schumer and Representatives Ryan and Pelosi:

The National Association of Community Health Centers (NACHC) appreciates Congress' ongoing efforts and dedication to addressing the opioid crisis, and is pleased to offer our support for H.R. 6, SUPPORT for Patients and Communities Act, and urge all House and Senate members to pass this important legislation.

NACHC is the national membership organization for federally qualified health centers (also known as FQHCs or "health centers"). Health centers play a critical role in the health care system, serving as the health home for over 28 million people, the majority of whom live under the Federal Poverty Level. With over 11,000 sites nationwide, FQHCs provide affordable, high quality comprehensive primary care to medically underserved individuals, regardless of their insurance status or ability to pay.

Substance use disorder (SUD), including opioid use disorder (OUD), is a top public health concern in the United States, and health centers have firsthand knowledge of the consequences. As opioid use disorder has become more prevalent, health centers are on the frontlines working to address the comprehensive needs of people at risk of developing SUD, as well as assisting those who are in need of treatment for existing SUD/OUD. From 2010 to 2017, health centers experienced a five-fold increase in patients receiving treatment for opioids or other substance abuse disorders. Since 2010, health centers have more than doubled their behavioral health workforce because of the increased demand for services, with 3,000 health center providers now authorized to provide Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT.) In fact, in 2017, nearly 65,000 health center patients received MAT from health center providers.

Health centers stand ready to serve their patients who are struggling with substance use disorder but there is a clear need for additional support and policy changes to enable them to do so more effectively.

We appreciate Congress' consideration of a multitude of critical policy issues in its response to the opioid epidemic, including several provisions included in H.R. 6 to:

- bolster the SUD workforce, including through new loan repayment opportunities for SUD providers
- create comprehensive opioid recovery centers (CORCs)
- Improve access to telehealth services
- Streamline Medicaid coverage for incarcerated youth and former foster youth
- Ensure mental health parity for pregnant women and children within the CHIP program
- Codify MAT prescribing regulations allowing Nurse Practitioners and Physician Assistants to prescribe buprenorphine as well as increased flexibility for patient caps, and allowing additional advanced practice nurses to prescribe for a period of 5 years

We particularly want to highlight our strong support for Section 6083 of the bill, which authorizes \$8 million to support expanded access to MAT at FQHCs and rural health clinics under the Medicare program. We believe this provision will be of great assistance to health centers who are initiating and expanding opioid use disorder treatment programs in underserved areas across the country.

Thank you again for all your hard work to bring this bill to fruition. We know there is more work we can do together to turn the tide on this public health crisis and look forward to continuing to work with you to address the needs of communities across the country.

Sincerely,



Tom Van Coverden

President and CEO of NACHC

cc: The Honorable Lamar Alexander, Chair of the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee of the United States Senate

The Honorable Patty Murray, Ranking Member of the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee of the United States Senate

The Honorable Orrin Hatch, Chair of the Finance Committee of the United States Senate

The Honorable Ron Wyden, Ranking Member of the Finance Committee of the United States Senate

The Honorable Greg Walden, Chairman of the Energy and Commerce Committee of the United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Frank Pallone, Ranking Member of the Energy and Commerce Committee of the United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Kevin Brady, Chair of the Ways and Means Committee of the United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Richard Neal, Ranking Member of the Ways and Means Committee of the United States House of Representatives