



March 23, 2020

Dear Member of Congress:

As the Coronavirus intensifies – and grim reports from Community Health Centers across the country increase in volume and gravity – it has become clear that a major revision and enhancement of our previous request for federal investments is necessary and urgent.

On behalf of the 236,000 Community Health Center employees at 12,000 care delivery sites across the country and the nearly 30 million patients we serve, I want to express our appreciation to you for your leadership and for acknowledging the frontline status of America’s health centers. Please be assured that we are working in concert with federal agencies and our state and local partners to coordinate efforts to fight this epidemic. We are grateful that the initial supplemental package included \$100 million for health centers to prevent, prepare for, and respond to the Coronavirus. Health centers have proven by mission and by action over our more than 50-year history that we are best positioned to treat vulnerable populations, including those most at risk for contracting the virus.

When Congress is crafting their current economic and health care stimulus program, please consider the following urgent priorities that will address the immediate threat, as well as, longer-term needs that enable us to prepare for and properly address future crises. Consistent with the spirit of, and building further upon, the March 20 CBC Priorities letter:

- a. In order to address the immediate needs of health centers, we are requesting:
  - i. Emergency funding (**at least \$3.4 billion now**) for centers at the frontline of addressing COVID-19;
  - ii. Legislative fix to include centers as eligible providers for Telehealth reimbursement under Medicare as they otherwise would be paid for an in-person visit. See TELEHEALTH NOTE below.
  - iii. And, to help CHCs address this current crisis as well as future emergencies and natural disasters – additional flexible funding of \$5 billion over 5 years.  
**(Total \$8.4 billion)**
  
- b. A 5-year reauthorization of the Community Health Center Fund and the National Health Service Corps, and funding for Capital projects (**at the levels laid out in Rep. Clyburn’s**

**H.R. 1943 Community Health Center and Primary Care Workforce Expansion Act of 2019). (Total \$47.57billion)**

- c. In addition, funding for the Teaching Health Centers Graduate Medical Education program which allows us to train our own CHC workforce – so we do not have to compete with others for scarce GME dollars. This program’s funding expires May 22. **(Total \$632.5 million over 5 years)**
- d. The longer-term need to address shortages in health workforce (including Behavioral health) who are serving our underserved communities, as well as expanded access to healthcare and telemedicine. With language directing HHS/HRSA to target areas of need specifically identified by CHCs. **(Total \$10 billion over 5 years)**
- e. **TELEHEALTH NOTE:** Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) and Rural Health Centers (RHCs) are unable to receive Medicare reimbursement for telehealth visits provided to patients at home. While Medicare patients are being advised to stay home, FQHCs and RHCs are receiving no reimbursement for providing them with critical care via telehealth. A statutory change is needed to allow FQHCs and RHCs to receive Medicare reimbursement for telehealth visits. **This change could be accomplished for the duration of the pandemic by amending Section 1135(g), and permanently by amending Section 1834(m), of the Social Security Act to allow CHCs and RHCs to bill Medicare as they otherwise would for an in-person visit, as included in Sec. 7 of the CONNECT for Health Act, H.R. 4932.**

We thank you again for your ongoing bipartisan support of Community Health Centers. We are proud to partner with you to strengthen the health care safety net, particularly in times of crises. Making these investments now will enhance our ability to meet the crisis at hand as well as what may confront us in the future -- and by doing so, we can better protect this great Nation. As this epidemic continues to unfold, we stand ready to support you in these efforts.

Sincerely,



Tom Van Coverden  
President and CEO  
National Association of Community Health Centers