

## INTRODUCTION

As community and patient-centered providers, the national network of Community, Migrant, Homeless, and Public Housing Health Centers brings a unique perspective to the circumstances in which their patients live, work, receive care, and change behaviors. Also known as Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), health centers have a long history of patient engagement in health care delivery and community wellness programs. These practices are rooted not only in their population health and wellness improvement missions but also in their federally mandated program requirements to be actively directed by a consumer-majority governing board and responsive to needs identified by the community.

Health centers' uniqueness in terms of structure, perspective, and stakeholders make them prime partners for community-engaged translational research. Most are eager to expand their research partnerships and capacity as a means to fulfill their missions of improving community health and narrowing health disparities. The fundamental principle in any

partnership is that both sides need to benefit. Understanding the context in which health centers operate and how that drives their research priorities will help researchers understand how to match their research objectives with those who provide health care to the populations in the communities they serve.

Increasingly health centers are engaging in or being asked to participate in research and evaluation. Health centers have long been recognized as both nimble in their ability to design, implement, and evaluate health care delivery innovations on patient care and robust enough in terms of its scalability to potentially 9000 sites nationwide. However, many health centers are not engaged in research, and most may not be engaged to the level they desire because of competing priorities, lack of staff time and funding, the need for research training, and collaborative partners who understand health centers' day-to-day demands and workflow.



### About This Toolkit

This toolkit is meant to provide researchers with the information they need to understand how the health center model can support their research initiatives. It is intended to depict how health centers operate, their research interests, their research experience, and their research needs. The modules in this toolkit will illustrate why health centers can be ideal research partners and why the unique richness of the populations in community based settings served by health centers can enhance research

objectives. The toolkit will discuss potential opportunities researchers may have by engaging health centers and their populations as well as tips for building sustainable partnerships. We believe that by including health centers and the populations they serve as research partners, researchers can expand the depth of their research initiatives from bench to bedside to a more novel approach to include bench to bedside "to the community" for more sustainable and lasting change.



### **How To Use This Toolkit**

This toolkit recognizes that expanding research concepts to include community populations involve different processes. The following modules in this toolkit are intended to provide a general overview of health centers and their patient populations, health center research experience, expectations and needs of health centers as research partners, and suggestions for establishing a research partnership with a community partner committed to your research initiative. The toolkit will demonstrate how health centers' unique structure and context necessitate certain models of engagement and research participation that are community-based; however, the toolkit will provide general

steps to take when engaging health centers. We encourage all those interested in working with health centers to read this document in its entirety; however it is a modulized resource for ease and convenience. It is important to note that reading this resource is no substitute for familiarizing yourself with a local health center and potential research partner. The information presented here represents national data; however, each health center is unique with different environments, resources, and priorities. Working with health centers to conduct research can lead to very rewarding partnerships with long-term benefits and significant impact.