



March 31, 2020

The Honorable Pete Gaynor, Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)
500 C Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20472

Dear Administrator Gaynor:

The United States has a primary health care system that serves as a principal lifeline of defense against COVID-19: The **Federally Qualified Community Health Center Program**. Partially funded and regulated by the Department of Health and Human Services, Community Health Centers serve 30 million patients, and operate 13,000 urban and rural clinics across every state, territory, and D.C. As you know from your time in Rhode Island, in stable times, CHCs deliver primary care and other health services to underserved communities. In this capacity, they prevent hospitalization, emergency room visits, and other high-cost treatments.

When emergencies strike -- hurricanes, floods, fires, hard-hit opioid areas -- CHCs step up, providing immediate care where it is needed most. In Puerto Rico, CHCs were essential to get health care services online in less than 24 hours after Hurricane Maria struck. In California, CHCs shifted patients to safe clinic locations during the fires over the last two years. Now, during the COVID-19 emergency, CHCs have established drive-through testing immediately after receiving testing kits and personal protection equipment in Alabama, Florida, and Washington State. They have increased telehealth services and transformed their operations to respond -- despite drastic drops in revenue from regular patient care.

With more than 100,000 staff in their care teams and the ability to integrate other clinical volunteers, these trusted community stakeholders are strategically placed to help mitigate the growth of COVID-19. With local hospitals, they create a framework to lessen the burden on emergency rooms and intensive care units. Through engaging their patients *via* telehealth and establishing testing protocols, CHCs now direct those with high disease burden to hospitals or tertiary care facilities and assure that moderately ill patients seek quarantine at home. This ultimately increases capacity for the entire system and moderates the demand for scarce hospital resources.

Like all providers on the front line, CHCs need protective supplies and equipment. As FEMA coordinates the management of this disaster, I urge the agency to strategically direct a fair share of them to CHCs -- and to advise state response efforts not to only include, but prioritize, CHCs in their mitigation and response plans with proper resourcing. They are on the ground today; they are ready to help.

Sincerely,

Tom Van Coverden
President and Chief Executive Officer

C: Alex Azar, Secretary, US Department of Health and Human Services

Main Office
7501 Wisconsin Ave
Suite 1100W
Bethesda, MD 20814
301.347.0400 TEL
301.347.0459 FAX
www.nachc.com