

EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear Readers:

The year 2020 introduced the world to COVID-19, a new deadly disease that continues to profoundly affect all of our lives in multiple ways. The virus has killed over 500,000 people in the U.S. to date. In hitting minority and vulnerable populations especially hard, the coronavirus has also exposed glaring disparities in the health status of different groups of people as a result of longstanding inequities in the American health care system in terms of who gets access to quality health care and how they get it.



One of the underlying forces of the 1960's civil rights movement, out of which Community Health Centers were created, was the goal to eliminate discrimination in health care. Yet, despite major strides made possible with passage of the landmark 1964 Civil Rights Act – meant to ensure greater legal protections against discrimination in the lives of African Americans and other minorities – health care inequality and its negative health outcomes for these populations have continued to persist and remain unabated at great cost to all of us as a nation.

Against this historical backdrop, and as we mark the 50th anniversary of the National Association of Community Health Centers (NACHC), we feel it fitting in this issue of *Community Health Forum* to explore the strategies and structures put in place at the national and state levels to protect and grow the health center mission. See “Building Mission Strength Through Association,” (page 8) and “Exploring the Early Years with NACHC’s Founding Executive Director” (page 22). These early and critical steps in large part defined the health center model of care as it evolved with its focus on expanding access and addressing both the social and economic root causes of poor health.

Also, in this issue and as a regular feature going forward, the Forum highlights the important role of health centers on the frontlines of their communities in providing COVID-19 testing, treatment and vaccinations, as well as their ongoing work in providing access to quality primary and preventive care for all in need.

The mission continues.

To your good health,

Claudia Green Gibson
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