**Community Health Centers Make The Difference in Local Vaccination Efforts**

This week marks the one-year anniversary of the Community Health Center COVID-19 Vaccination Program, an effort designed to protect underserved populations from COVID-19 which has claimed more than 900,000lives – including [INSERT STATE NUMBERS HERE] in [STATE].

In the winter of 2021 when the federal government was broadening eligibility for vaccine recipients, the Community Health Center Vaccination Program was developed to make sure vaccines were made available to underserved populations. Across the country, Community Health Centers serve 14.5 million people living in poverty, 2.9 million people 65 and older, 19 million people who are of minority background, and 1.5 million homeless people. [INSERT LOCAL STATISTICS WHERE APPLICABLE].

Despite surges of COVID-19 variants, the program has been a historic success, both in our communities and throughout the United States. According to [findings](https://bit.ly/healthcentersinfographic) from the National Association of Community Health Centers (NACHC) and the Morehouse School of Medicine’s National COVID-19 Resiliency Network (NCRN), there are fewer COVID-19 deaths and infections in areas of the country where a health center is located such as [INSERT LOCAL HEALTH CENTER]. This is the result of a boots-on-the-ground effort, bringing the COVID-19 vaccine to where the people are with mobile vaccination sites, testing and building vaccine confidence through culturally and linguistically tailored efforts to combat disinformation.

From the start, equity has been the North Star of the Biden Administration’s national vaccine strategy, and Community Health Centers like the one(s) in our state have played a central role in protecting populations who disproportionately suffered higher rates of infection from COVID-19. They include people who work in essential jobs that put them at higher risk, agricultural and migrant workers, public housing residents, the elderly and people experiencing homelessness, and low-income families who may lack access to essential health care services, live in rural areas, or are racial and ethnic minorities. Health centers have provided [19.2 million](https://www.nachc.org/fewer-covid-19-deaths-and-infections-in-areas-where-there-is-a-community-health-center/) COVID-19 shots, with over two in three shots at a health center administered to people of color. [INCLUDE SHOTS GIVEN BY HEALTH CENTERS IN YOUR state or local community health center].

While this success is worth applauding, we know there is more work to be done in the yearslong battle on the pandemic frontlines, which has exacted a toll on health care workers. Chronic workforce shortages are worsening due to problems that include exhaustion, trauma, COVID infections and recruitment challenges. Nearly half – 44 percent [INSERT STATE DATA IF AVAILABLE] health centers report they do not have adequate staff to administer vaccines as of January 2022. NACHC recently released a report on community health center workforces with policy recommendations to make improvement both now and into the future, and I hope [INSERT MEMBERS OF CONGRESS] will study their proposals and work to make them a reality.

While there is much work to be done, February 15 serves as a great way to highlight how Community Health Centers here and throughout the country have helped to combat the pandemic and saved countless lives in the process. We are grateful for these workers and know with the proper resources, they will continue to deliver much-needed health services in the communities that need them most.