



November 1, 2024

The Honorable Shalanda Young
Director
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Director Young:

Thank you for your leadership in the federal budgeting process and the Administration's strong support for Community Health Centers. I write to request that the Administration include in any supplemental funding request from Congress a set-aside for Community Health Centers affected by Hurricane Helene, Hurricane Milton, and other disasters since 2022. As safety net providers operating on razor-thin margins, health centers – and their communities – will struggle to recover from these disasters without dedicated federal support.

Community Health Centers are the best, most diverse, most innovative, and most resilient part of our nation's health system. For nearly sixty years, health centers have provided high-quality, comprehensive, affordable primary and preventive care, dental, behavioral health, pharmacy, vision, and other essential health services to America's most vulnerable, medically underserved patients in urban, rural, suburban, frontier, and island communities. Today, health centers serve 1 in 10 Americans at over 16,000 locations. Health centers recently reached a historic milestone of serving over 32.5 million patients, including nearly 10 million children and over 400,000 veterans. They provide care to one in seven rural residents, one in nine Medicaid beneficiaries, and one in five uninsured persons.

Hurricanes Helene and Milton affected dozens of health centers across the southeast of our country, disrupting operations and causing severe hardship for health centers' staff and patients. When health centers are knocked offline, diabetic patients miss appointments, pregnant women miss prenatal visits, children miss routine vaccinations, and behavioral health patients have their therapy interrupted. These interruptions in care not only worsen patients' health but also lead to an increase in avoidable hospitalizations and emergency department visits, further straining a healthcare system that is otherwise focused on emergency response.

Health centers' governance model of patient majority boards means they are well-positioned to respond to the unique effects of a disaster on a community. Health centers have demonstrated resourcefulness in the past month by meeting their communities' needs after the recent hurricanes. For example, in western North Carolina, health centers set up temporary shelters for displaced residents, bringing mobile health units to senior living centers, homeless shelters, and public housing authorities and utilizing all-terrain vehicles to reach homebound patients in rural counties. In Florida, many health center staff and patients evacuated to avoid personal injury, but upon return, they found their service locations and personal residences unreachable or damaged. After assessing staff safety and facilities' operability, Florida health centers turned to their communities in need, providing essential supplies to residents, utilizing mobile units to enable convenient

access, and collaborating with partners and other providers to leverage resources for short-term sustainability.

Health centers are grateful that Congress set aside funding for health centers' capital needs in disaster supplemental legislation in 2023, 2019, and 2018. Dedicated funding for health centers is necessary again to support their ability to meet their communities' primary care needs in the wake of Hurricanes Helene and Milton and other disasters across the country.

Allowing relief dollars to make up for lost revenue and economic losses would be the most straightforward way to bolster health centers' financial stability in the aftermath of these disasters.

Again, thank you for your leadership in developing the federal response to natural disasters this year and for your consideration of this request. Please feel free to reach out to Joe Dunn, NACHC's Chief Policy Officer, at jdunn@nachc.org or (703) 244-3799 if you have any questions about health centers' role in disaster response and recovery.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Kyu Rhee".

Kyu Rhee, M.D., MPP
President and Chief Executive Officer