

Community Health Centers Beyond the Pandemic Scenarios for Examining & Preparing for Future Realities

COVID-19 has raised the uncertainty of the times in which we live, or rather, has made much more palpable the uncertainty that existed all along. In recent weeks, widespread protests over racial injustice have compounded the anxiety that many are experiencing. It increasingly seems that we will look back on 2020 as a historically significant year along many dimensions.

The choices that community health center leaders make at this moment will likely shape the movement for decades. As past fears are realized and new opportunities appear, health center leaders must “keep their heads above water” to see the horizons on all sides and to move toward the best futures for the communities they serve. Examining the possible scenarios of recovery from COVID-19 better prepares CHCs to be agile and adaptive to any new reality.

In April and May, futurist [Eric Meade](#) from the [Whole Mind Strategy Group](#) developed [three scenarios](#) based on interviews and a poll of health center leaders, along with additional research. The scenarios describe *expectable*, *desperate*, and *aspirational* futures through the pandemic to the year 2023:

- The *expectable* scenario extrapolates existing trends and models to create what some may see as the “most likely” future.
- The *desperate* scenario presents a set of feasible challenges that would require exceptional creativity and effort to overcome.
- The *aspirational* scenario charts a pathway through the pandemic to a surprisingly successful future.

On May 27, 2020, NACHC hosted a Leadership Engagement / Learning event with members of the NACHC Leadership Network facilitated by Eric Meade to learn about three alternative scenarios describing the future of community health centers as the nation moves through the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants joined break-out groups, each assigned one of the scenarios, to identify the implications for community health centers and the populations they serve. The table, which you can find [here](#), presents highlights from the scenarios discussed in the May 27 session and the implications identified by participants.

Of course, the scope of the scenarios did not include the protests that would erupt nationwide after the death of George Floyd at the hands of the Minneapolis police. But now the future has changed, and many feel that this time it's different – for example, the protests are more diverse and there is greater public and private-sector support than in the past. One senses that there is no going back to the way it was before.

What are the possible outcomes of the protests and of the broadening conversation about racial injustice? How will they affect community health centers? Updated scenarios are offered below for your consideration:

- An expectable scenario: Ongoing peaceful demonstrations, along with a steady flow of reporting on individual instances of racial injustice, keep the topic top of mind for Americans and galvanize efforts to address systemic racism in law enforcement and the criminal justice system. Specifically, new laws eliminate “qualified immunity” for police officers, limit political contributions from police unions, and establish a national commission on the use of force by law enforcement. Health centers praise the achievements but lament the missed opportunity to enact change more broadly.
- A desperate scenario: The national political response to the protests tests American democracy to the limit and mirrors the process by which other democracies have failed. When protesters assault a team of active duty U.S. Army soldiers in downtown Washington, DC, the soldiers return fire, killing four teenagers and casting the nation into a military, civil, and constitutional crisis. Health centers find their communities engulfed in conflict and crisis and find it difficult to focus on health.
- An aspirational scenario: The mind-shift emerging from the protests recognizes the broad systemic factors underlying the drumbeat of police-involved killings of black men, and political leaders commit to addressing long-standing racial inequities across all aspects of life. Community health centers are shocked to see political leaders and health system CEOs beating a path to their doors, eager to learn from their experience addressing racism and other social determinants of health.

What other possible scenarios do you see? What thoughts and questions do you have about *how* to think about the future in times like these?

Share your perspectives by clicking [HERE](#) to take our short poll,
And join us on the [NACHC Leadership Office Hour](#) on June 17, 2020 at 2:00 pm ET
/ 11:00 am PT. [Register here!](#)