

Planning for the Future Health Center Workforce

Growing Today's Primary Care Workforce
to Meet Tomorrow's Health Care Needs

Community Health Centers depend upon a network of over 253,000 clinicians, providers, and staff to deliver on the promise of affordable and accessible health care. Long-term investments in **the nation's primary care** workforce are needed to achieve the cost-savings the country needs and ensure health centers are able to keep pace with the growing and changing needs in their communities.

Yet severe workforce shortages and growing salary gaps make it difficult for health centers to recruit and retain an integrated, multi-disciplinary workforce to provide high-quality care. For example, the Association of American Medical Colleges estimates a **national shortage of between 54,100 and 139,000 physicians by 2033**. Additionally, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects **175,900 openings for Registered Nurses each year through 2029** when nurse retirements and workforce exits are factored into the number of nurses needed in the U.S. Moreover, recent health care compensation data shows that **health center primary care physicians earn approximately 30% less** when compared for those same disciplines for physicians who work for hospitals.

Two critical workforce programs - the National Health Service Corps (NHSC) and the Teaching Health Center Graduate Medical Education (THCGME) program – are slated to receive additional funding in the American Rescue Plan. Yet the remaining workforce needs are significant.

The NHSC supports roughly 16,000 clinicians in urban, rural, and frontier communities. About 60% of all NHSC placements are at health centers.

- Thousands of additional applications to join the NHSC go unfunded each year. The \$800 million for NHSC and \$200 million for Nurse Corps in the American Rescue Plan will boost the number of approved applications, extending this opportunity to additional underserved communities.

The THCGME model directly trains providers at health centers in underserved communities, improving their understanding of the issues facing health center patients and increasing the likelihood they will choose to practice in these communities after they complete their training.

- In the 2018-2019 academic year, THCGME supported the training of 769 residents in 60 health centers in 25 states. Since it began in 2011, the program has supported the training of more than 1,148 new primary care physicians and dentists who have graduated and entered the workforce.
- The American Rescue Plan committed \$330 million to expand the THCGME program.

How you can help:

- **Cosponsor the Doctors of Community (DOC) Act (HR 3671 / S. 1958)**, from Energy and Commerce Chairman Frank Pallone (D-NJ) and HELP Chairwoman Patty Murray (D-WA), to permanently reauthorize the THCGME program. The bill would provide for an additional 100 new THCGME programs in communities across the country and creating an estimated 1,600 new resident physician slots.
- **Cosponsor the COMMUNITIES Act (HR 4285)**, from Representative Bobby Rush (D-IL), which would institute 100 percent loan repayment under the NHSC Loan Repayment Program if a healthcare professional commits to serving in an eligible underserved community for five years.