

Support Measures to Strengthen the Healthcare Workforce Shortage



Building the Workforce to Deliver Effective Care at Health Centers

Over **310,000 dedicated health professionals** work at Community Health Centers across the nation. Physicians, nurse practitioners, nurse midwives, dentists, physician assistants, optometrists, pharmacists, behavioral health specialists, case managers, community health workers, allied health professionals, and administrative staff **deliver comprehensive, high-quality, integrated primary care to more than 32.5 million adult and pediatric patients at over 16,000 delivery sites nationwide.**

These integrated primary care and preventive services care teams are the backbone of Community Health Centers who not only prevent disease but also reach beyond the walls of the exam room to address the drivers that may cause illness. **Severe workforce shortages driven by burnout and salary gaps make it difficult for health centers to retain and recruit staff.** NACHC estimates that **health center staff are paid 11 percent less on average than clinicians and staff at other primary care settings.** The Medicaid unwinding process is leading to significant disruptions in coverage for millions of Americans. **These changes, along with increasing marketplace competition, strain the existing workforce and make recruiting the next generation more difficult.**

Core Workforce Programs at Health Centers

National Health Service Corps (NHSC): Established over 50 years ago, the NHSC program supports thousands of primary care medical, dental, and behavioral health providers through scholarships and loan repayment programs. Data shows that over 80% of NHSC alums continue to serve in an underserved community. Base funding for the program was continued in March, but the program now faces a December deadline.

Teaching Health Center Graduate Medical Education Program (THCGME): This program increases the number of primary care and dental residents trained in community-based settings. Evidence has shown that physicians trained in Teaching Health Centers are three times more likely to work in safety net clinics than those who did not. Congress extended the funding in March, but now the program faces a December 2024 deadline.

Legislation Impacting Expiring Community Health Center Workforce Funding

- The bipartisan **Lower Costs, More Transparency Act (H.R. 5378)** passed the House of Representatives by a vote of 320-71 late last year. It increases NHSC funding by more than 10 percent to \$350 million annually and more than doubles the THCGME program to \$300 million over seven years.
- The **Bipartisan Primary Care and Health Workforce Act (S. 2840)** passed the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee last fall. The legislation makes historic investments by tripling the NHSC to \$950 million annually, providing \$300 million per year for the THCGME program, and additional resources for nursing programs, such as Nurse Corps and the Nurse Practitioner residency program, and new career laddering programs for allied health professionals.

Ask

- Support **\$950 million per year** for the National Health Service Corps to **fund all applications in designated Health Professional Shortage Areas.**
- Support **\$300 million per year for the Teaching Health Center GME program** to fund existing and Planning and Development grantees and increase the **Per Resident Amount to \$210,000 over time.**

Planning for the Future Health Center Workforce



Projected Health Workforce Shortages

Community Health Centers strive to **be comprehensive medical, behavioral health, and dental homes for all patients**. However, data from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) shows that health center patients can receive more comprehensive services if health centers had additional staff. Estimates show that **12.3 million more health center patients could benefit from behavioral health services**, but shortages of behavioral health staff severely limit access.

HRSA estimates that over the next 15 years, the nation will need over **68,000 primary care physicians, nearly 9,000 dentists, and over 100,000 psychiatrists and psychologists**. Allied health professionals are also in high demand. HRSA projects the nation needs **100,000 medical assistants and over 32,000 dental assistants by 2036**.

Health centers are creating solutions for workforce challenges - **more than 80 percent of health centers have set up workforce development programs and partnerships in their communities**. Federal investments can scale up these successful programs and create good-paying jobs in underserved communities.

Health Care Workforce Innovation Act (H.R. 7307 / S. 4957)

According to the Medical Group Management Association, **each clinical provider needs two allied health professionals, such as medical assistants, dental hygienists, pharmacy technicians, peer specialists, and billing and coding professionals, to effectively care for patients**.

The bipartisan Health Care Workforce Innovation Act (H.R. 7307), introduced by **Reps. Marc Molinaro (R-NY) and Angie Craig (D-MN)**, and S. 4957, introduced by **Senators Ron Wyden (D-OR), Marsha Blackburn (R-TN) and Ben Ray Luján (D-NM)**, to scale up promising community-based programs:

- This bill authorizes HRSA to issue **grants to establish or expand partnerships between Community Health Centers**, high schools, vocational-technical schools, community colleges, and Area Health Education Centers.
- Grants can also be used to **develop preceptorship training-to-practice models for medical, behavioral, and oral healthcare professionals in integrated community-driven settings**, such as health centers.
- New and existing healthcare career laddering programs will support and incentivize young recruits to stay in the field long-term.

Ask: Support legislation that funds these important programs, such as the **Health Care Workforce Innovation Act (H.R. 7307 / S. 4957)**, and the Senate **Bipartisan Primary Care and Health Workforce Act (S. 2840)**.