



September 13, 2021

The Honorable Frank Pallone
Chairman
Committee on Energy & Commerce
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Pallone:

On behalf of 1,400 health centers and the nearly 29 million patients they serve, the National Association of Community Health Centers (NACHC) is grateful for your longstanding support of health centers, and recognition of the importance of access to high-quality affordable health care. We deeply appreciate your leadership in securing \$10 billion for Community Health Center capital projects, \$6 billion for the Teaching Health Center Graduate Medical Education (THCGME), and \$300 million for the Nurse Corps in the Build Back Better Act.

This historic commitment to health center capital funding is critical to ensure meaningful access for the growing number of patients treated at health centers. This funding will widen the reach of health centers into additional underserved communities. According to a recent assessment by Capital Link, nearly all health centers surveyed have at least one planned capital project over the next few years. These projects vary in scope, but the top three identified needs are primary medical services, mental health, and dental services. Health centers are eager to utilize this funding, so they can provide more patients access in these areas.

Moreover, the Committee's investment in workforce programs will broaden opportunities for individuals considering a future in primary care, which will pay dividends for years into the future. As you know, a 2021 study from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) concluded that primary care is the only discipline of medicine where a greater supply is equated to improved population health, longer lives, and greater equity. The Committee's legislation will allow for the expansion of the THCGME program and nursing opportunities and build on the funding from the American Rescue Plan.

NACHC is also supportive of the Committee's commitment to expanding access to Medicaid and Affordable Care Act coverage. Approximately half of all health center's patients are enrolled in Medicaid. The comprehensive package of Medicaid reforms – closing the coverage gap to help cover millions living in non-expansion states; permanently extending the Children's Health Insurance Plan (CHIP); establishing 12-month postpartum coverage for mothers and 12-month continuous eligibility for children; and permanently extending express lane eligibility for children, among others – will strengthen the ability of health centers to continue providing the primary care and prevention services that our patients rely on every day.

Additionally, given that most health centers across the country provide dental services – and many provide vision services as well – NACHC strongly supports the inclusion of Medicare benefits coverage for dental, hearing, and vision care. This policy is long overdue and will be incredibly impactful for America’s seniors. We hope to continue to work with you to ensure that health centers can be comprehensive medical homes for the more than 3 million Medicare beneficiaries cared for at health centers. In particular, we would encourage you to consider the uniqueness of health center reimbursement through the Congressionally mandated Prospective Payment System. PPS is central to health centers continued financial viability, and utilizing a PPS for Medicare dental, vision, and hearing services would be consistent with the existing Medicare statutory structure – and State Medicaid as well – for the comprehensive bundle of health center services.

Thank you, Chairman Pallone, for your leadership in laying the foundation for a more equitable health care system through the Build Back Better Act. We look forward to our continued partnership with you and your staff as the legislation moves forward.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Van Coverden". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Tom Van Coverden
President and CEO