

2021 Priorities for Health Equity

Health centers were founded with a common mission to advance health equity for the underserved. They have stepped up in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, serving the communities most impacted by the pandemic.

Congress has laid critical groundwork in support of health centers: thank you for passing the American Rescue Plan, extending our mandatory funding in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, and supporting access to discounts through the 340B pharmacy program.

Here is how Congress can further leverage the health centers and prioritize health equity:

Preserve, Strengthen & Expand the Health Center Program

Demand for health center services is growing, yet health centers struggle to make ends meet. Health centers need resources, including workforce and facilities, to serve the growing demand for care.

- Support Fiscal Year 2022 Appropriations:** Support robust discretionary funding (\$2.2B) for community health centers in the FY2022 Labor, Health and Human Services (LHHS) Appropriations bill by signing onto the annual DeGette-Bilirakis Dear Colleague letter.
- Include Health Centers in Infrastructure Legislation:** We are pleased to see the just released House Energy and Commerce Committee's Leading Infrastructure For Tomorrow's America Act, (LIFT America Act), includes \$10 billion to fund capital projects for community health centers, \$7 billion for core health infrastructure for States and Tribal entities, and a \$80 billion broadband buildout across the country. As the LIFT America Act moves through Congress we ask you to work with your colleagues to ensure it remains committed to the infrastructure needs of California's CHCs.
- Expand Health Workforce Investments:** Support investments in workforce programs that prioritize increasing the racial/ethnic diversity and cultural and linguistic sensitivity of the health care workforce.

Ensure Equitable Access by Maintaining Telehealth Flexibilities

Health centers have transformed their services in response to the pandemic, offering telehealth so that patients can access care safely from home. Yet reimbursement for telehealth is temporary, and many health center patients lack access to broadband and smart devices.

- Make Permanent Telehealth Flexibilities and Payment Parity:** Support actions ensuring that health centers can continue to provide virtual care, and that payment parity for video and audio visits continues after the Public Health Emergency is lifted.
- Support Efforts to Mitigate the Digital Divide:** New investments in telecommunications infrastructure are sorely needed to help bridge the digital divide and improve equity in access to healthcare and education.