



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
Community Health Centers

June 29, 2020

The Honorable Alex Azar
Secretary of Health and Human Services
Hubert Humphrey Building
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Azar,

On behalf of our nation's 1400 health centers, serving nearly 30 million patients in over 12,000 communities nationwide, the National Association of Community Health Centers (NACHC) encourages you to extend the Public Health Emergency in advance of its upcoming expiration date of July 25, 2020.

The pandemic continues to affect communities across the country, and, without an extension of the emergency, health centers' patients risk even more serious illness, delayed care, and worsening chronic conditions. Further, the role that each health center plays as an integral component of a system of care will likely place an added strain on hospitals around the country.

COVID-19 is the greatest pandemic that our nation has faced in nearly 100 years. As primary care providers in underserved communities, health centers often serve at the center of their communities, and the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted their roles. Health centers are providing critical testing and triaging in response to COVID-19 but are also maintaining routine primary and preventive care of their patients. In many instances, they have relied on innovative strategies to do this, from creating drive up and mobile testing sites, utilizing telehealth and telephone services to continue providing needed care, and making effective use of personal protective equipment to ensure the safety of their patients.

The Public Health Emergency declaration has allowed for additional flexibilities at the federal and state level, which ensures that health center patients are able to access the care that they need. As health care providers on the front lines, it is clear that the pandemic is still affecting communities across the country and that these flexibilities are critical to the sustainability of the health care system. As such, we request that you extend the Public Health Emergency declaration, as long as the pandemic continues to impact our communities. The flexibilities afforded through the Public Health Emergency allow health centers, and other health care providers, to most effectively serve their patients. We cannot begin to imagine the additional strain our health centers would have faced without this emergency declaration, which is why we are asking that you continue this declaration for the months, and possibly year, ahead during which health centers will continue to respond to the virus. Additionally, when the appropriate time comes, we request that the Department work directly with the states to ensure that an appropriate process to phase out the Public Health Emergency is in place, allowing for a seamless end to the Public Health Emergency for both patients and providers.

We appreciate your consideration of our request and the Administration's efforts to support health

centers and the patients that they serve during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thank you for your partnership and we will continue to work together to address this pandemic.

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