



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF  
Community Health Centers

## - Fix The Primary Care Cliff - INVEST IN WHAT WORKS IN OUR HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

The United States continues to face a shortage of primary care capacity. Research indicates that as many as 62 million Americans lack regular access to primary care due to barriers such as geography, income, and insurance status. These shortages lead to poorer health outcomes and increased costs for the health care system and taxpayers as health care is delivered in more expensive settings such as emergency rooms. America's Health Centers have grown the nation's primary care infrastructure and today provide quality medical, dental, behavioral health and vision care to more than 22 million patients in 9,000 communities across the country. The Health Center grant is the cornerstone of this success, allowing every federally-funded local center to leverage significant non-grant resources to meet the pressing challenges of their communities.

### A Threat to Primary Care Access

The Health Center grant is financed through a mix of annual discretionary appropriations and mandatory funding appropriated through the Affordable Care Act. In FY2016, Health Centers face a funding cliff: the mandatory funding for Health Centers will end unless it is reauthorized. With only discretionary funding at current levels, Health Centers would see up to 70% reductions in grant funding, leading to significant cuts to operations and reduction or elimination of health care access in some of the nation's most vulnerable communities. This would occur just as the demand for the type of care Health Centers provide is growing.

In addition to Health Centers, the National Health Service Corps and Teaching Health Center programs also face looming funding cliffs. The National Health Service Corps is a vital program that provides scholarships and loan repayment to providers that commit to serving in underserved areas. The Teaching Health Center program is an innovative effort focused on growing the supply of primary care providers trained in community-based settings.

Taken together, the threats to these three programs constitute a Primary Care Cliff that threatens the stability and sustainability of our health care system. Failing to fix this cliff would send the country in the wrong direction by reducing primary care capacity and sending costs spiraling upward.

### A Proposal to Fix the Primary Care Cliff and Reaffirm That Access Is the Answer

Health Centers are asking policymakers to resolve the unanticipated Primary Care Cliff by continuing the mandatory funding for these three critical programs for the next 5 years. Mandatory funding provides the certainty that those operating a Health Center, choosing a career in primary care, or operating a residency program need in order to plan and budget most effectively. Congress and Presidents of both parties have long recognized that access to Health Centers and primary care is the answer for many of the ills facing our health care system. Now is the time to invest in what works and fix the Primary Care Cliff.

#### The Health Center Request

Health Centers urge Congress to avert the looming Primary Care Cliff by:

- ✓ **Reauthorizing the mandatory Health Center Fund** for FYs 2016-2020 and providing sufficient funding for Health Centers to serve 35 million patients by 2020.
- ✓ Continuing funding for the vitally important **National Health Service Corps** and **Teaching Health Center** primary care workforce programs over the same period.