



September 8, 2020

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor, State of California
State Capitol Building, 1st Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: AB 2164 (Rivas): E-Consult Services and Telehealth Assistance Program – SUPPORT

Dear Governor Newsom:

I am most appreciative of the efforts of your administration to ensure communities in California have access to telehealth during this public health emergency. These policies are critical to access to care and must be extended. **Health Center Partners respectfully requests your signature on AB 2164 (Rivas).** This important bill would improve access to health care services for low-income children and other marginalized populations by ensuring that Community Health Centers (CHCs) can deliver care to new patients in trusted community settings, like schools and Head Start sites using telehealth.

As you know, CHCs are leveraging telehealth and telephonic technology to improve access to care and meet increasing patient demands. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, CHCs used telehealth to overcome physical capacity limitations and existing socioeconomic barriers that prevented many patients from accessing care directly at CHCs. But since the presence of COVID-19, CHCs have implemented the Department of Health Care Services telehealth and telephonic guidance to provide safe and rapid access to health care, while minimizing face-to-face visits, in this way protecting both health care workers and patients.

CHCs are proving that telehealth is both safe and effective, and since COVID-19, a viable and critical solution to overcoming existing barriers to access to care. CHCs must be able to continue to integrate innovation and technology into their practices and clinical workflows to better serve their patients – to meet them where they are. ***Over the last 14 weeks, telehealth and telephonic encounters have accounted for an average of 65% of all patient visits among HCP's 16 member organizations, which serve more than 850,000 patients each year for more than 3.6 million patient visits each year, at 160 practice sites, across San Diego, Riverside, and Imperial Counties.***

Today, roughly 1,370 California CHCs provide high-quality comprehensive care to 7.2 million people – **one in six Californians.** Through Health Center Partners members, that translates to **1 in 5 San Diegans – 20% of the entire population.** While here for all, traditionally, CHCs have served the state's most vulnerable and marginalized populations including one in three Medi-Cal beneficiaries. But, because of their living situation, many traditional CHC patients cannot physically access care directly at CHCs, due to socioeconomic barriers, like the inability to take time off from work, and the lack of meaningful transportation. Through the CHC response to COVID-19, telehealth and telephonic care have become



critical mainstays to patients' health maintenance and well-being. Moreover, in many regions of the state, school-based telehealth programs are the only source of care for children.

Ensuring CHCs can continue to establish patients using telehealth will be critical after the state of emergency ends. The precedent has been set. And the results are stunning. For these reasons, these modalities will be required after the public health emergency ends, and you and I must ensure historically marginalized populations continue to access care in these ways, because this policy has proven effective and efficient in delivering quality care to those who might otherwise not receive it.

The legislature has made clear their intent in providing safe and timely access to health care via telehealth. It will increase access to vital and cost-effective health care services for thousands of patients in historically marginalized communities across California. I welcome the opportunity to speak with you further on this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Henry N. Tuttle".

Henry N. Tuttle
President and CEO
htuttle@hcpsocal.org

cc: Assemblymember Rivas
Assemblymember Salas

[Health Center Partners of Southern California](#), a family of companies, includes a 16-membership organization of federally qualified health centers, Indian Health Services Organizations, both urban and sovereign, and Planned Parenthood of the Pacific Southwest, collectively serving 850,000+ patients each year, for 3.6 million patient visits each year, at 160 practice sites across San Diego, Riverside, Imperial counties, with the seventh largest provider group in the region. Read our award winning [2018/2019 Impact Report](#).