

October 28, 2014

The Honorable John Boehner  
Speaker of the House  
U.S. House of Representatives  
H-232 US Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Harry Reid  
Majority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
S-221 US Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Minority Leader  
House of Representatives  
H-204 US Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Minority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
S-230 US Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Congressional Leaders:

On behalf of the national organizations listed below, our membership, leadership, employees, customers and patients, we are writing to urge Congress to act immediately to avert a potentially disastrous disruption within our health care system. The scheduled expiration, at the end of FY2015, of dedicated funding streams supporting the operations of Community Health Centers, scholarships and loan repayments through the National Health Service Corps, and primary care training in Teaching Health Centers represents a significant threat to the nation's primary care infrastructure. We urge Congress to act during the upcoming lame duck session to extend funding for these critical programs in a way that averts this "primary care cliff" and ensures the stability and viability of access to health care in thousands of communities nationwide.

The federal Health Centers program supports the operations of nearly 1,300 health center organizations nationwide, operating sites in more than 9,000 communities. Governed by community boards, health centers deliver a range of primary and preventive care services – including medical, oral health, behavioral health, pharmacy and vision services. Health centers serve as integrated "health care homes" for more than 22 million patients, including nearly 7 million children and more than 268,000 veterans. Health centers employ more than 156,000 Americans, and generate both economic impact and overall cost savings to the health care system measured in the billions of dollars. Were these reductions to go ahead, health centers would lose up to 70 percent of total federal funding, causing site closures, staff layoffs, and most importantly, a loss of access to care for millions of patients.

The National Health Service Corps (NHSC) plays a vital role within a primary care system strained by provider shortages and barriers to access. The NHSC provides scholarships and loan repayment to primary care practitioners – physicians, nurses, physician assistants, oral health and behavioral health professionals – who make a multi-year commitment to service in underserved communities. In 2012, the NHSC placed more than 10,000 providers in Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs) across the country. NHSC providers are a critical element of the primary care workforce, not just in health centers, but in a variety of other care settings in

underserved urban and rural communities. The funding stream that currently supports the NHSC is set to expire at the end of FY2015 – meaning that without action, the program will end completely.

Teaching Health Centers (THCs) are community-based primary care training programs committed to preparing health professionals to serve the health needs of underserved communities. Beginning in 2010, Congress authorized dedicated funding to support the direct and indirect medical education expenses for training residents in new or expanding community-based primary care residency programs. Teaching Health Centers are located in a variety of settings, including urban, rural and Tribal communities, and serve populations such as veterans and their families, minority communities, older adults, children and adolescents. During the 2014-2015 academic year, 63 Teaching Health Center Graduate Medical Education (THCGME) programs in 24 states will support more than 550 medical residents. According to the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), physicians trained in health centers are more than three times as likely to work in a health center and more than twice as likely to work in an underserved area as those not trained at health centers. All funding for the THCGME program is set to expire at the end of FY2015, but the recruitment of new residents is being impacted now. Because of this funding uncertainty, the completion of training for many current residents and the admission of new residents are in serious jeopardy.

Taken together, these critical programs generate thousands of jobs, create much needed economic impact in urban and rural communities, and serve as the foundation of access to a health care system moving toward prevention, wellness, quality and cost-savings. The collective impact of the primary care cliff, if not addressed, would be devastating not only to the provider organizations and health professionals directly impacted, but to the patients and communities served by those providers, and to the health care system as a whole. Even now, health centers, residency programs and communities are stifled by the uncertainty caused by this looming funding cliff.

We strongly urge Congress to act during the upcoming lame duck to address the looming shortfall in each of these programs, which work both independently and synergistically to undergird our nation's health care system, in order to ensure the stability and viability of that system moving forward. We welcome the opportunity to work with Congress to address this vital issue impacting our nation's health care system.

Sincerely,

National Association of Community Health Centers

9to5

AIDS United

American Academy of Family Physicians

American Academy of Physician Assistants  
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy  
American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine  
American Association of Teaching Health Centers  
American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, Inc.  
American College of Nurse-Midwives  
American College of Osteopathic Internists  
American College of Physicians  
American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists  
American Dental Association  
American Dental Education Association  
American Dental Hygienists Association  
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees  
American Geriatrics Society  
American Medical Student Association  
American Nurses Association  
American Optometric Association  
American Osteopathic Association  
American Public Health Association  
American Thoracic Society  
America's Essential Hospitals  
Asian American Psychological Association  
Association for Community Affiliated Plans  
Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations  
Association of Clinicians for the Underserved  
Association of Departments of Family Medicine  
Association of Family Medicine Residency Directors  
Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs

Benco Dental  
Breast Cancer Action  
Capital Impact Partners  
Capital Link  
Coalition on Human Needs  
Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service  
Community Health Center Capital Fund  
Community Reinvestment Fund, Inc.  
CSH  
Dignity Health  
Enterprise Community Loan Fund  
Every Child Matters  
Families USA  
Farmworker Justice  
First Focus  
GLMA: Health Professionals Advancing LGBT Equality  
Health Outreach Partners  
Hepatitis Foundation International  
IFF  
League of United Latin American Citizens  
Local Initiatives Support Corporation  
Low Income Investment Fund  
Mercy Loan Fund  
NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals  
National AHEC Organization  
National Alliance on Mental Illness  
National Alliance to End Homelessness  
National Asian Pacific American Families Against Substance Abuse

National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth

National Association of Counties

National Association of County and City Health Officials

National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners

National Center for Farmworker Health

National Coalition for Asian Pacific American Community Development

National Coalition for the Homeless

National Coalition on Health Care

National Council for Behavioral Health

National Development Council

National Health Care for the Homeless Council

National Immigration Law Center

National Kidney Foundation

National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty

National Low Income Housing Coalition

National Network for Oral Health Access

National Network for Youth

National Rural Health Association

National Urban League

National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable

National WIC Association

Nonprofit Finance Fund

North American Primary Care Research Group

OCA - Asian Pacific American Advocates

Opportunity Finance Network

Oral Health America (OHA)

Partnering for Change

Partners for the Common Good

Physician Assistant Education Association

Primary Care Development Corporation

Resources for Human Development

## RESULTS

School-Based Health Alliance

Single Stop USA

Society of General Internal Medicine

Society of Teachers of Family Medicine

Southeast Asia Resource Action Center

Special Olympics

Summit Health Institute for Research and Education, Inc.

The Housing Partnership Network

The Reinvestment Fund

Trust for America's Health

USAction

Welch Allyn

Cc:

The Honorable Harold Rogers, Chair, House Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Nita M. Lowey, Ranking Member, House Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Fred Upton, Chair, House Committee on Energy and Commerce

The Honorable Henry Waxman, Ranking Member, House Committee on Energy and Commerce

The Honorable Dave Camp, Chair, House Committee on Ways and Means

The Honorable Sander M. Levin, Ranking Member, House Committee on Ways and Means

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski, Chair, Senate Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Richard Shelby, Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Tom Harkin, Chair, Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions

The Honorable Lamar Alexander, Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Health, Education,  
Labor and Pensions

The Honorable Ron Wyden, Chair, Senate Committee on Finance

The Honorable Orrin Hatch, Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Finance

