



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

April 30, 2021

Dear Colleagues:

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and exacerbated severe and pervasive health and social inequities in America. Despite continuing efforts to address these inequities, communities of color and other populations that are underserved continue to be affected disproportionately by the pandemic. As President Biden stated in his *Executive Order on Ensuring an Equitable Pandemic Response and Recovery*, addressing these inequities is both a moral imperative and pragmatic policy. It is impossible to change the course of the pandemic without tackling it in the communities that are disproportionately affected. To this end, the President has directed a government-wide effort to address health equity.

In response to the President's mandate, we, the Secretaries of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Housing and Urban Development (HUD), are directing our agencies to ensure that the national response to COVID-19 delivers equitable, comprehensive care to those experiencing disproportionate impact, including HUD-assisted individuals and households.

HHS-supported community health centers have been on the front lines during the COVID-19 public health emergency, providing testing and care for those affected by the virus, monitoring and managing COVID-19 symptoms to alleviate the burden on emergency rooms and hospitals, and coordinating with state and local health departments to support a unified and comprehensive public health response. Health centers are providing COVID-19 vaccines to underserved communities and those disproportionately affected by COVID-19, including through the Health Center COVID-19 Vaccine Program. Health centers have also continued to provide essential primary health care services, including managing conditions that put patients at increased risk for COVID-19 complications. These services are available to all patients, regardless of their ability to pay. Patients may qualify to receive care at a reduced cost or free of charge, depending on their economic status.

The efforts underway by HHS-supported community health centers are critically important to the people and households assisted by HUD, who have a higher prevalence of risk factors that may place them at increased risk of COVID-19 transmission, illness, and mortality. A large proportion of those who are helped by HUD are people of color, age 65 or older, have disabilities, and have underlying health conditions. They often live in high-density housing or congregate settings (e.g., homeless shelters) and have mobility and transportation needs. Additionally, many HUD-assisted individuals and households live at or below the poverty level.

HHS and HUD will work collaboratively and leverage available resources to increase access to the full continuum of COVID-19 prevention and treatment services – including COVID-19 tests and vaccines – among disproportionately affected populations nationwide, including HUD-assisted households. This moment calls on us to do more to stop the spread of the virus and to

better serve communities of color, rural areas, populations with low income , and other disproportionately affected communities.

We encourage all community health centers to establish or further expand existing partnerships with local HUD grantees and program participants, including single- and multi-family housing owners/managers, public housing authorities, Continuums of Care, and homeless providers. These partnerships should engage at the local level as part of a comprehensive strategy to prevent, mitigate, and respond to COVID-19, including through testing, treatment, and vaccination. This includes accessible, culturally responsive outreach on vaccine safety and efficacy to increase vaccine confidence.

In the coming days, HHS and HUD will also provide further resources, tools, and guidance on the specific steps and strategies that community health centers, Aging and Disability Resource Centers, Area Agencies on Aging, Centers for Independent Living, state Assistive Technology Act programs, and HUD grantees and program participants can take to facilitate broader access to COVID-19 vaccines and testing. The steps and strategies may include:

- Conducting targeted outreach regarding COVID-19 vaccine efficacy and safety to encourage all eligible individuals to obtain COVID-19 tests and vaccines;
- Assisting with registering and scheduling COVID-19 tests and vaccine appointments;
- Facilitating on-site vaccine clinics at HUD-assisted or insured properties, public housing developments, homeless shelters, and through mobile facilities serving people experiencing unsheltered homelessness;
- Using state assistive technology accessibility kits to provide accessible testing and vaccination sites;
- Assisting with transportation as needed to vaccine sites, including for people who have limited mobility;
- Supporting self, mobile, drive-up, and/or walk-up testing that addresses the unique and evolving access barriers experienced by disproportionately affected populations;
- Providing information regarding access to comprehensive primary health care services; and
- Ensuring that communications are provided in plain language and in formats that are accessible to people with disabilities.

We recognize and appreciate the efforts you have undertaken over the course of the past year. We are excited about the impact these partnerships will have, and we look forward to your continued support in the weeks and months ahead. Together, we will put this pandemic behind us.

Sincerely,



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