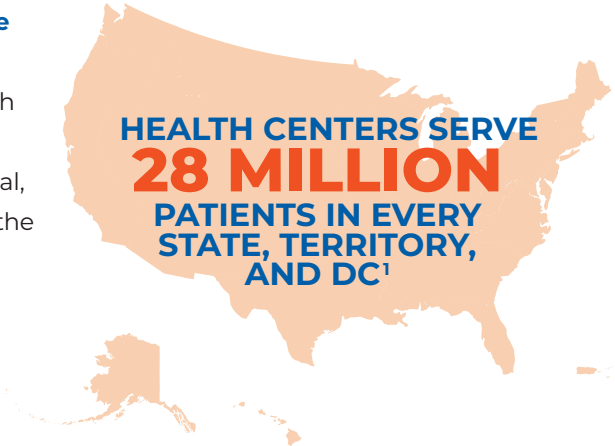
Community Health Centers:
A Guide to a Vital Network of Care

Community Health Centers are medical clinics and so much more.

They are consumer-driven and patient-centered medical homes, local economic engines, and trusted community partners. They form the backbone of America's health care safety net and play a critical role in improving health outcomes, lowering costs, and ensuring access to high-quality, integrated care.

By mission and statute, the health center model requires that health centers locate in areas of greatest need and are led by representatives of the population they serve. In doing so, **health centers reach people facing the greatest difficulty accessing or affording health care services,** who are at greater risk of unnecessary hospitalizations or costly health complications. At health centers, everyone is guaranteed access to timely care regardless of insurance status or ability to pay. All health centers offer a comprehensive and integrated set of primary care services, including medical care, behavioral health, dental, vision, and case management, among other services, depending on the needs of the community.

Thanks to continued bipartisan support from federal and state policymakers, health centers currently serve 28 million patients – or 1 in every 12 people – in every state, territory, and the District of Columbia.[1] At the same time, they eliminate waste and excess costs, **saving the entire health care system more than $24 billion annually.[2]** This graphical brief highlights the fundamental reasons why health centers have grown into America's largest primary care network and, in doing so, have become vital health service providers for local, regional, and national health systems – and most importantly, for the millions of patients they serve.



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
Community Health Centers®

MARCH 2019

Health centers **serve those who face the greatest challenges** accessing or affording essential health services.

Health Centers Serve:[3,4]

1 in 3 People in Poverty

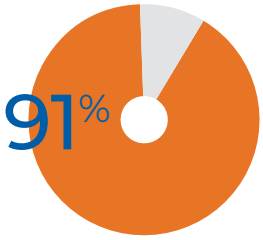
1 in 5 Rural Residents

1 in 5 Uninsured Persons

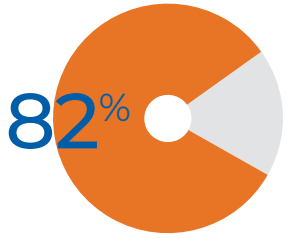
1 in 6 Medicaid Beneficiaries

1 in 9 Children

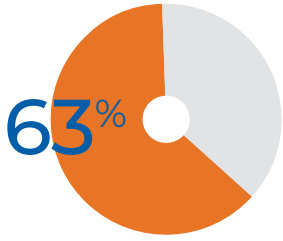
91% OF PATIENTS ARE LOW-INCOME
(200% Federal Poverty Level or Below)



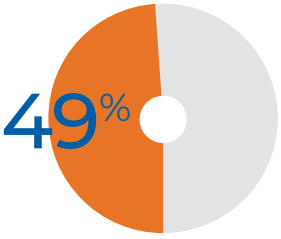
82% OF PATIENTS ARE UNINSURED OR PUBLICLY INSURED



63% OF PATIENTS ARE RACIAL OR ETHNIC MINORITIES



49% OF PATIENTS ARE INSURED THROUGH MEDICAID ALONE



1.4 MILLION
HOMELESS PATIENTS

970,000+
AGRICULTURAL WORKERS

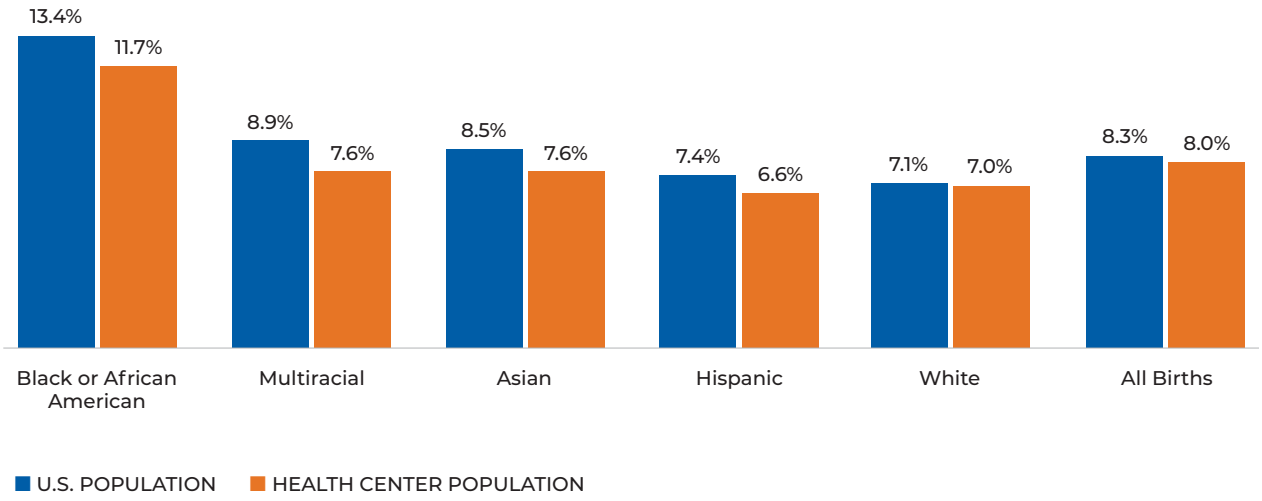
800,000+
SCHOOL-BASED HEALTH CENTER PATIENTS

355,000+
VETERANS

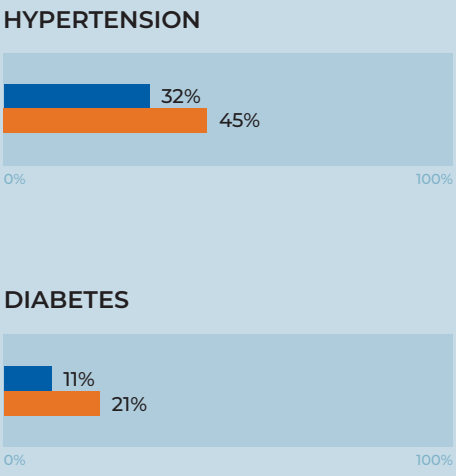
Health centers **provide high-quality health care, improve health outcomes, and narrow health disparities,** even while serving more high-risk, low-income patients.

Percent Low Birth Weight Babies, 2017[3]

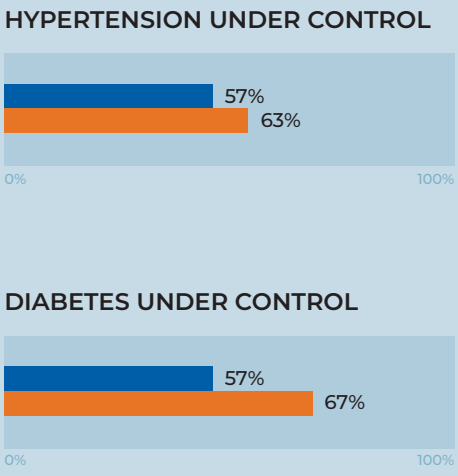
An Indicator of Poor Health Outcomes and Higher Cost



Percent of Adults Who Have Ever Been Told They Have:[3]



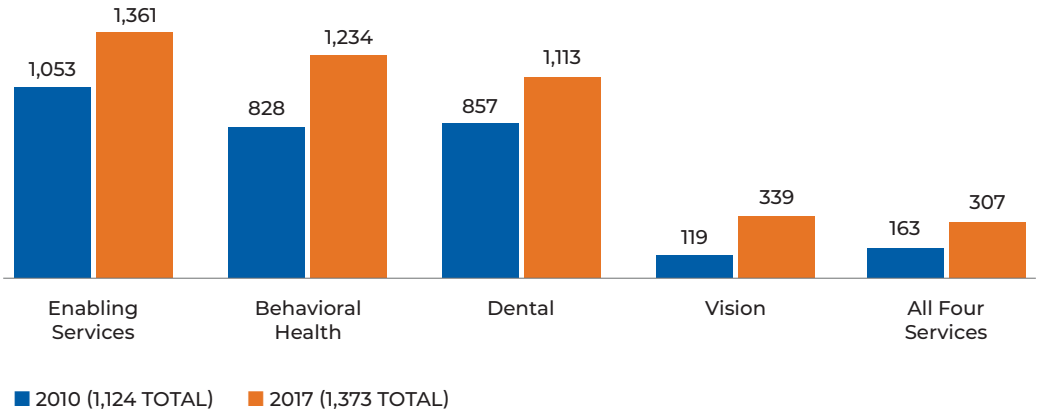
Percent of Population with Chronic Condition Under Control:[3]



Health centers **provide a wide array of comprehensive services** to meet the complex needs of their patients.

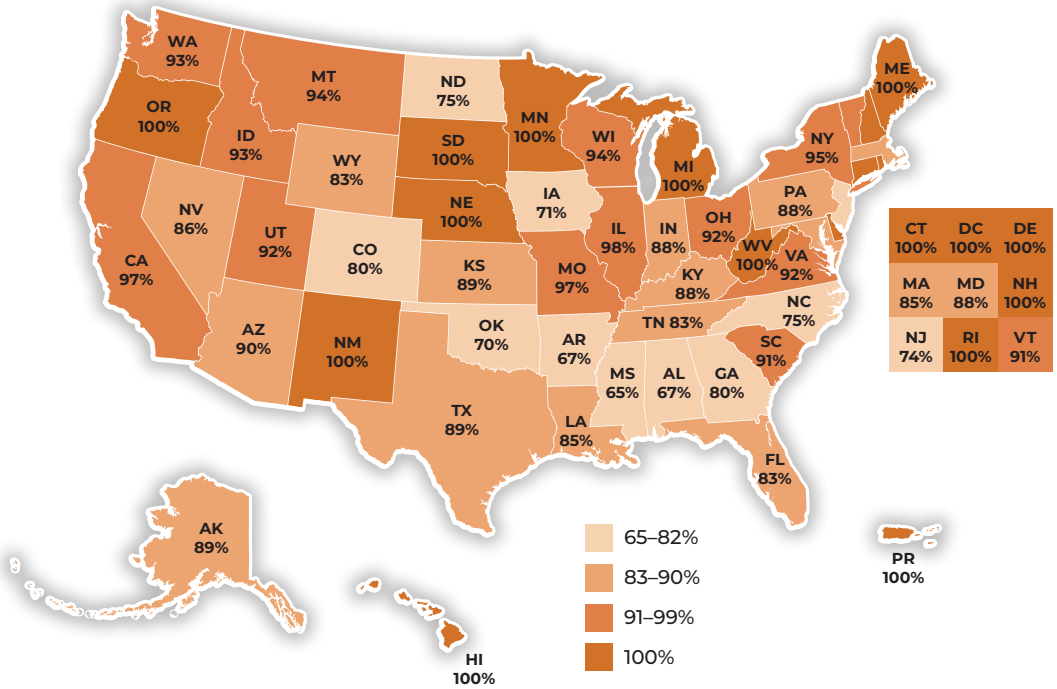
Number of Health Centers Offering Selected Services Onsite, 2010 vs. 2017[3]

(In Addition to Medical Care)



Nationally, 90% of health centers provide behavioral health services onsite.

Percent of Health Centers Offering Behavioral Health Services, Including Substance Use Disorder and Opioid Treatment, 2017[3]



What are Enabling Services?

Enabling services boost access to primary care and improve the effectiveness of health services. These services set health centers apart from other providers. For example, health centers employ (in full time equivalent, or "FTE")[4]:

8,500
CASE MANAGERS AND CARE COORDINATORS

1,100
TRANSLATION/ INTERPRETATION STAFF

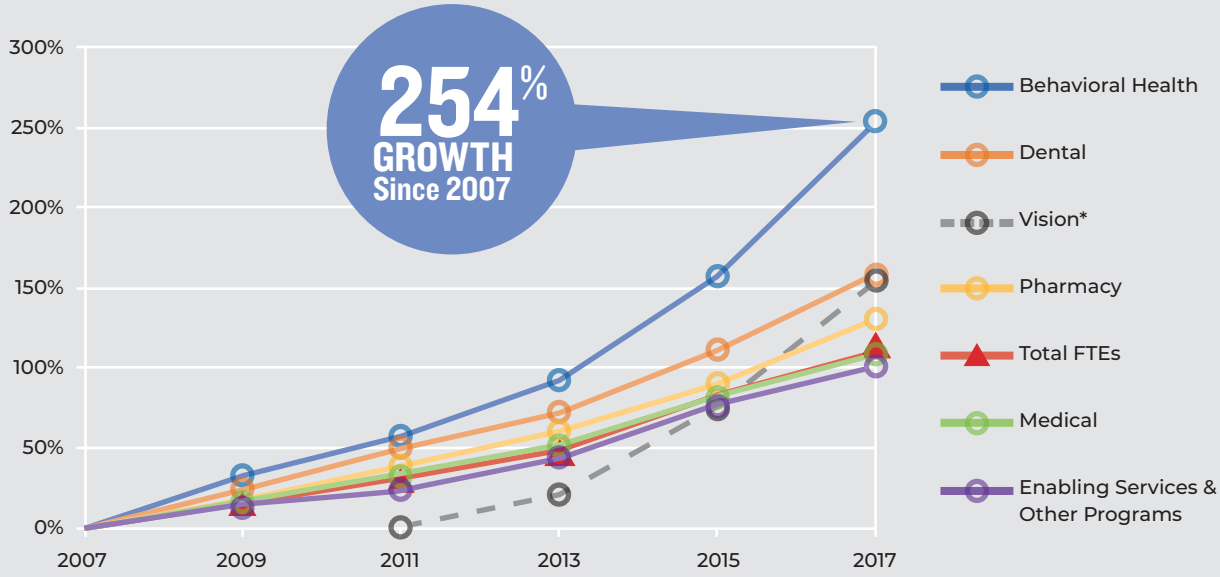
750
TRANSPORTATION STAFF

21,700
TOTAL ENABLING SERVICES STAFF

Health centers **respond to changing and pressing needs of the communities they serve.** They are on the front lines of the opioid epidemic, responding to public health emergencies, and addressing chronic disease.

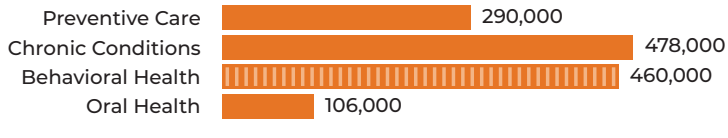
Percent Growth in Health Center Staff for Select Services, 2007–2017[4]

(In Full Time Equivalent, or "FTE")



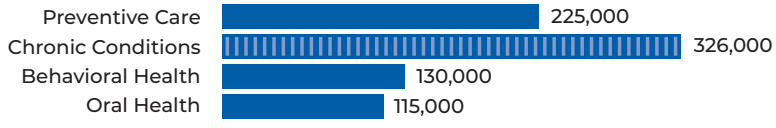
In **West Virginia**, the state with the highest rate of opioid-related overdose deaths,[5] health centers are ramping up behavioral health visits.

VISITS FOR SELECTED SERVICES AND DIAGNOSES† IN WV[4]



In **Alabama**, the state with the highest rate of heart disease mortality,[6] health centers provide more visits to treat chronic conditions.

VISITS FOR SELECTED SERVICES AND DIAGNOSES† IN AL[4]



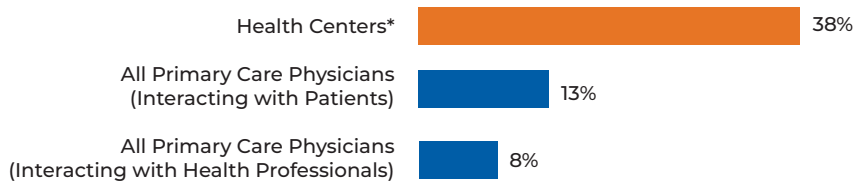
* Vision staff were not recorded in the Uniform Data System until 2010. The figure above shows the percent increase for vision staff in the full time equivalent since 2011.

† A list of the selected services is available in the "Sources and Endnotes" to NACHC's "State Fact Sheets." Available from www.nachc.org/research-and-data/state-level-data-maps/.

Health centers **launch innovations** to improve care, reduce costs, and boost access for patients.

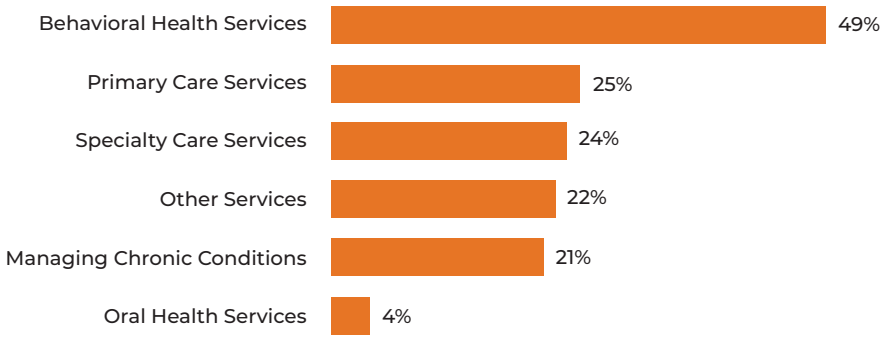
Health centers are quickly adopting telehealth[7] to provide timely and cost-effective access to care for patients.

Percent of Primary Care Practices Using Telehealth, 2016[4,8]

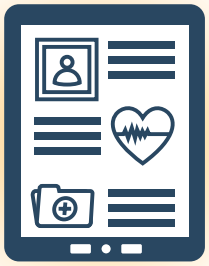


Percent of Health Centers Using Telehealth for Specific Services, 2016[4]

(Note: Percentages Include Only Health Centers Using Telehealth in 2016)



Health centers are finding effective ways to get patients in the door — even by utilizing ride-sharing networks and apps.



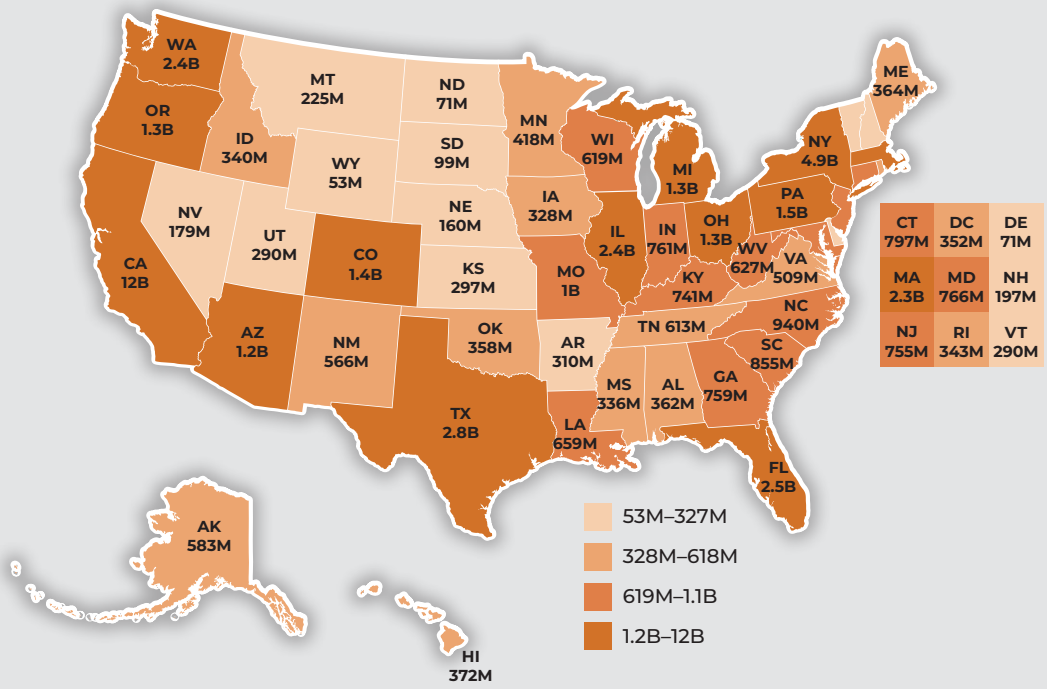
Health centers were among the earliest adopters of electronic health records (EHRs), and today, health centers have a nearly universal (over 99%) EHR adoption rate.[4]

*Telehealth utilization for health centers includes any type of interaction, including interactions with patients and health professionals.

Health centers **promote growth in their local economies,** often serving as the largest employer, and **deliver cost-savings to the health care system.**

Total Economic Impact from Health Centers by State, 2017[9]

(M/B = Millions/Billions of Dollars)



Nationally, every $1.00 of federal Health Center Program funding generates $5.73 of economic activity for low-income and underserved communities.

In total, HEALTH CENTERS GENERATE

$54.6 BILLION

in economic activity.

Health centers care for 1 in 6 Medicaid beneficiaries nationally[3] and deliver major savings to the Medicaid Program at 24% lower cost compared to other providers.[10]

Total Annual Cost of Care for Medicaid Beneficiaries who Receive Primary Care at Health Centers vs. Non-Health Centers:[10]

NON-HEALTH CENTERS

TOTAL SPENDING

$9,889

HEALTH CENTERS

TOTAL SPENDING

$7,518

24%

LOWER TOTAL SPENDING

Sources:

[1] NACHC estimates based on 2017 Uniform Data System for federally-funded and look-alike health centers and estimates for annual patient growth.

[2] Ku et al. Using Primary Care to Bend the Curve: Estimating the Impact of a Health Center Expansion on Health Care Costs. GWU Department of Health Policy. Policy Research Brief No. 14. September 2009.

[3] NACHC. Community Health Center Chartbook. January 2019.

[4] Uniform Data System, Bureau of Primary Health Care, HRSA, DHHS. Note: Unless otherwise indicated, all data refers to the 2017 Uniform Data System.

[5] National Institute on Drug Abuse. Opioid Summaries by State. February 2018.

[6] National Center for Health Statistics. Heart Disease Mortality by State. January 2019.

[7] The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) defines telehealth as "the use of electronic information and telecommunication technologies to support and promote long-distance clinical health care, patient and professional health-related education, public health and health administration."

[8] Kane, C. K and Gillis K. The Use of Telemedicine by Physicians: Still the Exception Rather than the Rule. Health Affairs 13(12). December 2018.

[9] Leavitt Partners in collaboration with NACHC. Based on Bureau of Economic Analysis RIMS II Industry-Specific Multipliers for Ambulatory Health Care Services. December 2018.

[10] Nocon et al. Health Care Use and Spending for Medicaid Enrollees in Federally Qualified Health Centers Versus Other Primary Care Settings. AJPH 106(11). November 2016. Note: Non-Health Centers include private physician offices and outpatient clinics.

Acknowledgements:

The National Association of Community Health Centers thanks all of the health centers and advocates who shared their photos for this brief.

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