

Happy Friday! It's hard to believe it's already mid-August, and with the November elections less than three months away, we hope you are able to enjoy some downtime before the political race to the finish line picks up. Please read on for ACH and D.C. policy updates.

Thank you to those who joined us last week for our Health Center Grassroots Week of Action! As you know, advocacy is a year-round effort, and we encourage you to continue sharing our [grassroots advocacy tools](#) with your health center staff to build on last week's momentum. We would also encourage you to continue reaching out to your representatives and invite them to tour your facilities during this August recess and in the months leading up to the November elections. (Please [let us know](#) if you have a facility visit scheduled with your Senators or Members of Congress - we would love to highlight you in our social media and newsletter!)

Congratulations to [Sherry Hoback, MBA, BSN, RN, President and CEO of Tampa Family Health Centers, as the inaugural recipient of ACH's David B. Vliet Changemaker Award!](#) We were excited to receive so many nominations of outstanding community advocates who work daily to improve the lives of health centers and the patients they serve.

Finally, we announced a new [340B Learning Collaborative](#) for ACH members this week and applications are now being accepted until September 13, 2024. We hope you'll join us for this deep exploration of the 340B Drug Pricing Program alongside other ACH members and experts in the field.

The Latest News from D.C.

The House and Senate have entered August recess and are not expected to return to D.C. until September 9. Debates continue, however, over government funding and appropriations bills, as lawmakers work to avoid a potential government shutdown. [The House Freedom Caucus supports a continuing resolution \(CR\)](#) that extends funding into early 2025. This

would avoid an end-of-year omnibus but is linked to a bill requiring proof of citizenship for voting, making it unlikely to garner Democratic support in the House and dead on arrival in the Senate. We anticipate a chaotic, yet familiar, September and lame-duck session as these funding debates continue.

Meanwhile, the presidential election has been heating up, with candidates from both parties intensifying their campaigns. Don't worry about missing the MTV Video Music Awards (VMAs) - [they've been rescheduled](#) so that you can tune into the [September 10 debate](#) between former President Trump and Vice President Harris.

Last week, [Harris officially secured the Democratic nomination for President](#) ahead of the Democratic Convention in Chicago next week. Shortly after, she announced her VP running mate Minnesota Governor Tim Walz - [the "dad energy" the party needed](#).

[Although he has a smaller national profile, Walz is popular in Minnesota, where 91% of Democratic voters approve of his job performance.](#) While in Congress, Walz voted for Medicare drug price negotiation, supported medical research of cannabis, and to extend Veteran Affairs' studies of the health effects of the toxin Agent Orange. As Governor, Walz has aimed to position Minnesota as a safe haven for access to abortions and gender-affirming care. In his state, Walz has led efforts to increase and advance the health workforce – including establishing a task force. Notably, [Walz signed into law 340B contract pharmacy protections](#) this summer, making Minnesota the 7th state to do so.

The Big Picture

Even the Biden Administration is in a state of uncertainty, with [several key health regulations stalled at the Office of Management and Budget \(OMB\)](#). One of these rules, a proposed ban on menthol cigarettes, has been stuck at OMB since October. It is expected to remain there until after the election, amid concerns that implementing the ban now could

negatively impact support among Black voters. Other proposed and final rules awaiting clearance include pandemic preparedness, COVID-19 and healthcare workforce safety, and gun safety rules implementing a bipartisan deal to enhance mental health programs and strengthen background checks. As we navigate these final months before the election, we eagerly anticipate potential healthcare victories to emerge.

Updates on ACH Priorities and Legislation

[For more information on our ongoing policy initiatives, please read our 2024 Policy Priorities Progress Report!](#)

CHC Invest

- ***Action Alert* Sign-on Letter:** ACH is circulating [a stakeholder letter](#) asking Congressional leadership to reauthorize the Community Health Center Fund at \$5.8 billion/year for three years by December 31, 2024, when the fund expires. This call to action is open to all national, state, and local organizations, including state primary care associations and health centers. **Signatures are due by COB on Tuesday, September 10, 2024.** To sign on, please go to this link: <https://forms.gle/3ZNVKpfnYKJAYtZC8>. Meanwhile, we continue meeting with members of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, Senate HELP Committee, and Senate Finance Committee to push for sustainable, increased, and long-term funding for the Community Health Center Fund.
- **Senate LHHS Bill & Discretionary Health Center Funding:** On August 1, the Senate Appropriations Committee [approved](#) its version of the Labor, Health, and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Bill, which includes flat funding for the Health Center Program at \$1.858 billion. This is the same level that was included in the House version of the bill, and the same level that health centers were funded at in Fiscal Year 2024 and Fiscal

Year 2023. This is yet another reason we need Congress to enact a long-term Community Health Center Fund reauthorization this year with meaningfully increased funding.

- **Commonwealth Fund Survey:** We are grateful to the Commonwealth Fund for its 2024 National Survey of Federally Qualified Health Centers, which demonstrates the critical importance of these safety net clinics to our nation's underserved communities while showing in real time the barriers they face in delivering much-needed care. Unfortunately, federal funding for health center programs has failed to keep up with inflation or health centers' growing patient populations and need for services. [Read our statement.](#)

340B/C

- **Bipartisan 340B Letter:** On August 1, Reps. Scott Peters (D-CA) and Marianne Miller-Meeks (R-IA) and led a group of 14 bipartisan colleagues [in a letter to the House Energy and Commerce Committee Chair and Ranking Member](#) urging the Committee to serve as a forum to advance solutions aimed at strengthening and reforming the 340B program. From various meetings on and off the Hill, ACH is confident that this letter indicates support towards a potential House companion bill to the Senate's (to-be-introduced) SUSTAIN Act.
 - *Of note*, the letter was signed by all three original sponsors of the ACCESS Act, Reps. Buddy Carter (R-GA), Larry Buschon (R-IN), and Diana Harshbarger (R-TN)

Value-Based Care

- On July 23, we hosted the ACH VBC working group call with FQHC experts from the [Center for Health Care Strategies \(CHCS\)](#). The call centered around findings from their [recent report](#) about strategies to build health equity focus into VBC payment designs in Medicaid. Additionally, ACH is working with groups (such as [NAACOS](#)),

on issues around the Medicare Physician Fee Schedule, and will circulate questions for comments to the working group later this week. On September 13, the VBC Working Group will discuss the group's priorities for 2025.

Health Equity

- **Data Equity:** Due to summer schedules and travel, the [Data Equity Coalition](#) meeting, originally scheduled for August 13, has been postponed. ACH will attend the rescheduled meeting and will share the information with our members when the meeting date is announced. As a reminder, the Coalition has made [several resources available](#) to the public for advocacy and information to highlight the importance of data equity's role in advancing health equity in areas such as black maternal health, mental health, and sexual orientation gender identity sexual characteristics (SOGI).

FQHC Workforce

- **Strengthening the Mental Health Workforce Act:** Last summer, Rep. Troy Carter Sr. (D-LA) introduced [H.R. 3760](#), the "Strengthening the Mental Health Workforce Act." This legislation caught our attention at ACH as an endorsement opportunity; however, after discussion with the Workforce Working Group, we realized minor changes would need to be made to the bill to include all eligible FQHCs. Earlier this summer, ACH met with Rep. Carter's office to suggest these changes. This week, Rep. Carter's office reached out to ACH indicating they're happy to incorporate the changes, and we look forward to working with their office to support the reintroduction next Congress.

Emergency Preparedness

- **Working Group:** The group will meet August 20 to finish updating the priorities for 2025.

- **Call for Experts:** The National Academies Forum on Medical and Public Health Preparedness for Disasters and Emergencies is seeking experts to participate in an upcoming workshop that will examine strategies, policies, and innovative actions to improve the resilience of health care and public health critical infrastructure to impacts from disasters and other emergencies. Please submit nominations by **August 23, 2024**. For any additional questions regarding the workshop, please view the [project page](#) or email Shalini Singaravelu, Program Officer, at SSingaravelu@nas.edu.

Other News from Across the Federal Government

Department of Health and Human Services

- **Breaking Language Barriers:** HHS has issued Division-Specific Language Access Plans to help provide accessible, culturally and linguistically competent, and comprehensive health care and human services. The effort is led by the Department-wide Language Access Steering Committee and run by the HHS' Office for Civil Right. See [this link](#) for the various department plans, including plans from CDC, CMS, HRSA, IHS, and ASPR.

Health Resources and Services Administration

- **National Health Center Week:** HRSA released their latest [2023 UDS data](#) showing that CHCs served over 31 million patients served by health centers last year representing 9% growth (+2.7 million patients) since 2020. Visit the [Four Years of Health Center Outcomes webpage](#) to see the complete Top 10 outcomes list.
- **Health Center Program History:** [HRSA announced the launch of a new website](#) focused on the history of the Health Center Program. The site provides an overview of health centers through the last six decades. You can view a promotional video

HRSA created, where they conduct interviews on HRSA's history - including an interview with our very own Amanda Pears Kelly! - on [HRSAtube](#).

Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services

- **Medicaid Unwinding:** According to the [Kaiser Family Foundation tracker](#), as of August 1, nearly 25 million Medicaid enrollees have been dis-enrolled. Of those, 69% (54.3 million) have since had their coverage renewed.
- **Guidance on Family Planning:** CMS has recently issued [guidance](#) outlining the requirements for state Medicaid agencies to guarantee enrollees' access to family planning services. The bulletin emphasizes state obligations, offers strategies to improve access to contraception, outlines confidentiality requirements for individuals seeking family planning services, and presents recommendations on measuring the quality of delivering such services.
- **ACO REACH Changes:** CMS is updating the model with new benchmark adjustments, continued implementation of the V28 risk adjustment model, and a stop-loss adjustment. The changes will begin in the performance year 2025. More details on the model's updates can be found [here](#).
- **FY 2025 Inpatient Hospitals:** CMS has recently finalized the [Inpatient Prospective Payment System \(IPPS\) and Long-Term Care Hospital Prospective Payment System \(LTCH PPS\) rule](#), with a focus on enhancing support for historically underserved communities and advancing value-based care initiatives. Operating payments rates for acute care hospitals is projected to increase 2.9% and the LTCH PPS was increased by 3.0%. Other policies include increased access to gene therapy for sickle cell disease and implements section 4122 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023, which provides Medicare funding for 200 new graduate medical education slots starting in 2026, of which at least half must be distributed for a psychiatry or psychiatry subspecialty residencies.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

- **COVID Surge:** Over the past two weeks, the percentage of people testing positive for COVID-19 has surged according to [CDC data](#). As the COVID-19 infection rates surge and the virus continues to mutate, ACH recommends keeping as [up-to-date as possible with available boosters](#) for staff, patients, and family.

ICYMI

- [Closing The Gap in Value-Based Care: Lessons from Provider-Led ACO Experience](#), Health Affairs
- [Community Health Centers' Progress and Challenges in Meeting Patients' Essential Primary Care Needs](#), The Commonwealth Fund
- [Better Data to Improve Medicaid](#), JAMA
- [CHCs defy staff shortage woes, promote healthcare access](#), TechTarget

Upcoming Events of Interest

- **August 28:** [ACH Members-Only Policy Office Hours](#) 12:00 - 1:00 PM (EST), *Virtual*
- **September 9-11:** [National Academy for State Health Policy: NASHP Annual Conference](#), *Nashville, TN*
- **October 8:** ACH Emerging Issues Series: *“Behavioral Health Opportunities and Challenges for FQHCs and CCBHCs”*, *Registration link will be made available one month prior to the event*
- **November 13-14, 2024:** [ACH 340B Learning Collaborative Kick Off](#), *Washington, D.C.* **Submit an application by September 13, 2024**
- **December 2-4:** [Third Annual Social Determinants of Health Policy Forum](#), *Washington, D.C.*

Please let us know if you have any questions and have a great rest of your week!

Sincerely,

Your ACH Policy & Government Affairs Team

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