



March 3, 2021

The Honorable Diana Espinosa, MPP  
Acting Administrator  
Health Resources and Services Administration  
5600 Fishers Lane  
Rockville, MD 20857

CC:

Jordan Grossman  
Chief of Staff  
Health Resources and Services Administration  
5600 Fishers Lane  
Rockville, MD 20857

Subject: Ensuring Geographic Equity in COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution

Dear Administrator Espinosa:

The National Association of Rural Health Clinics represents over 4,800 federally qualified rural health clinics across this country. We are writing to ask that HRSA expand the Ensuring Equity in COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution program to rural health clinics (RHCs) and critical access hospitals (CAHs).

Expanding the Ensuring Equity in COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution program to rural health clinics and critical access hospitals, located in rural and underserved areas would be an excellent way to combat geographic disparity in vaccine distribution. As currently structured, there is a significant swath of rural, underserved America that will not benefit from this program because there are relatively few federally qualified health center sites located in rural areas compared to RHCs and CAHs.

The Kaiser Family Foundation [found](#) that “rural residents are among the most vaccine hesitant groups” and their data show that only 31% of people in rural areas say they will “definitely get” the vaccine. We believe that rural health clinics and critical access hospitals are better situated than for example, drug store chains, to overcome this vaccine hesitancy as trusted providers in their communities.

In May, HRSA administered \$225 million of funding to rural health clinics (just under \$50k per RHC) through the Rural Health Clinic COVID-19 Testing Program. This funding has supported 8 million COVID-19 tests since May according to data reported on [RHCcovidreporting.com](#) (the

official reporting site for the program). These same clinics are willing and ready to vaccinate their and would be natural partners for an expanded vaccine distribution program.

As vaccine supply accelerates with the approval of the Johnson and Johnson vaccine, we hope that HRSA will decide to ensure *geographic* equity in COVID-19 vaccine distribution by expanding this program to rural safety-net providers such as rural health clinics and critical access hospitals with funds appropriated for vaccine distribution in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021.

Sincerely,

*Nathan Baugh*

Nathan Baugh  
Director of Government Affairs  
National Association of Rural Health Clinics  
(202) 543-0348  
[Nathan.Baugh@narhc.org](mailto:Nathan.Baugh@narhc.org)