



## **Healthcare Ready program highlights crucial support needed for healthcare workforce in underserved communities**

### *Staff shortages lead to burnout, potential healthcare access disparities*

**WASHINGTON (February 28, 2024)** –[Healthcare Ready](#) — the nonprofit organization established to help strengthen the U.S. healthcare system and assist communities in planning for, responding to, and recovering from disasters and disease pandemics — concluded a year-long initiative to understand the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and other disaster-related trauma on the healthcare workforce and highlights significant losses and burnout among healthcare workers, especially those who serve rural, low-income, or racially and ethnically diverse populations.

The Restoring the Healthcare Workforce for Equity Program (RHWE) comprehensive initiative was funded by a grant from the [Center for Disaster Philanthropy \(CDP\)](#), an organization committed to mobilizing philanthropy to strengthen the ability of communities to withstand disasters and recover equitably when they occur. It focused on all individuals working in Community Health Centers (sometimes referred to as Federally Qualified Health Centers or FQHCs), and free and charitable clinics, regardless of specialty or profession.

The program includes a needs assessment, multiple policy briefs, and trainings on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on healthcare workforce trends and not only shows greater shortages and burnout among healthcare workers working in underserved communities, but also examines the essential role of leaders and policymakers in fostering positive workplace culture and equitable policies.

The findings were released by Healthcare Ready in partnership with [Association of Clinicians for the Underserved \(ACU\)](#) and the [National Association of Free and Charitable Clinics \(NAFC\)](#) and funded by the Center of Disaster Philanthropy (CDP).

### **Research from the initiative revealed several key findings:**

- Health centers and clinics, serving diverse and economically challenged populations, are experiencing higher worker losses than other healthcare organizations, such as hospitals, signifying potential risks to care currently being received by more than 31.5 million and 2 million Americans, in health centers and clinics, respectively.
- Ongoing pandemic-related stress has led to staff shortages in health centers and clinics, exacerbating burnout and potentially worsening healthcare access disparities.

- People living in U.S. counties that experienced disproportionately greater COVID-19 cases and deaths are at increased risk of being impacted during future natural disasters, potentially due to worsening disparities in healthcare access.

Current debates surrounding the federal budget leave these critical safety-net facilities with an uncertain future, unless long-term funding and other workforce and education policies are passed, as has been done in previous years.

“Community health centers and free and charitable clinics provide crucial primary and preventive care services. They serve diverse communities in underserved areas across the U.S.,” says Angie Im, associate director of research and policy at Healthcare Ready. “To avoid worsening healthcare disparities and health outcomes — especially in the face of increasing disasters — it’s imperative that Congress continue to provide necessary supports to meet the needs of this essential workforce.”

Healthcare Ready assists in coordinating public and private partners, including federal agencies involved in disaster response, state emergency operations centers, and health systems — hospitals, clinics, and Community Health Centers — to assess healthcare needs and impacts by:

- Connecting needs and resources between nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), nonprofits, and shelters for supplies/medicines, and donations
- Assessing potential risks to critical infrastructure and healthcare supply chains
- Sharing resources and state-specific information to assist healthcare facilities, communities, and individuals
- Intelligence gathering and situational reporting

Visit [Healthcare Ready’s Restoring the Healthcare Workforce for Equity Program page](#) to explore the report and other resources, including an in-depth look at a series of virtual trainings on mental health and resilience, informational policy briefs, and other resources for healthcare leaders for fostering more inclusive and supportive work environments.

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Special note to journalists: [Angie Im](#), Healthcare Ready’s associate director of research and policy, is available to serve as a subject matter expert. Please contact Laura Perillo to request an interview.

#### **About Healthcare Ready**

[Healthcare Ready](#) is a nonprofit organization that serves as a public-private nexus to prevent patient care disruptions amid crises. We do this by forging partnerships and serving as the linkage point between the healthcare supply chain and government. By working with supply chain stakeholders, emergency management, patient advocacy groups, and community-based organizations, we help safeguard patients before, during, and after crises by leveraging our core capabilities. For more information, visit [healthcareready.org](http://healthcareready.org) or on Twitter [@HC\\_Ready](#).