

AllianceChicago (AC), a Health Center Controlled Network (HCCN) whose mission is to promote individual, community and public health through innovative collaboration, plays a significant role in supporting its participating Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) in adopting sustainable practices and improving climate related health outcomes among our communities. As an HCCN, AC serves as a critical public health and general informatics resource for FQHCs and, through its leadership role, in organizing and supporting public health initiatives that leverage technology.

More than 1 in 11 individuals get care in a Community Health Center (CHC), and these patients comprise an underrepresented segment of minorities, economically and socially disadvantaged people, and other populations that are most vulnerable to climate change.¹ In Illinois, there are 45 Community Health Centers serving more than 1.3 million patients; over 70% of CHC patients in Illinois live below the poverty line.² CHCs serve a population that is over 40% Hispanic or Latino, 24% Black or African American, and 4% Asian. Because of their prominence in the communities they serve, the ability for staff to be from these communities influences care positively.³

To ease the burden on already taxed and short-staffed community health centers, AC will convene a working group comprised of key leaders from at least 5 CHCs to develop a robust Climate Action Plan that specifically addresses the unique needs and patient population of CHCs. Leveraging existing guidance from Climate Action Plans developed for hospital systems, we will provide CHCs with a plan that allows them to choose which actions are feasible for them in the short- and long-term. The CHC Climate Action Plan will include:

- A scalable guide to reducing medical waste and energy use at CHC facilities.
- A training guide for providers and staff to educate them on waste and energy reduction
- Educational resources for providers and medical teams on recognizing climate related health risks that specifically impact vulnerable populations

The working group will also take steps to collaborate with local community-based organizations, public health departments, and local government to leverage existing resources and ensure actions taken are in line with what is being done across their communities.

With the assistance of the working group, AllianceChicago will be able to create an effective and readily implementable action plan to encompass both health care delivery and organizational impact on climate change for the population served by CHCs.

¹ Health Center Program: Impact and Growth. Bureau of Primary Health Care. Published August 20, 2018. Accessed July 12, 2021. <https://bphc.hrsa.gov/about/healthcenterprogram/index.html>

² Health Center Program Data. Accessed July 30, 2021. <https://data.hrsa.gov/tools/data-reporting/program-data?type=AWARDEE&state=IL>

³ Rosenbaum S, Tolbert J, Sharac J, et al. Community Health Centers: Growing Importance in a Changing Health Care System - Issue Brief. KFF. Published March 9, 2018. Accessed July 30, 2021. <https://www.kff.org/report-section/community-health-centers-growing-importance-in-a-changing-health-care-system-issue-brief/>