



April 7, 2020

The Honorable Mike Parson
Governor, State of Missouri

Dear Governor Parson:

Missouri has a primary health care system that serves as a principal lifeline of defense against COVID-19. Community Health Centers, also known as Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), serve nearly 600,000 Missourians and operate 200 sites in every region of the state. During stable times, FQHCs deliver primary care and other health services to underserved communities and prevent hospitalizations, emergency room visits, and other high-cost treatments. In order to effectively confront the COVID-19 crisis, our FQHCs need PPE, and we urge the state to coordinate with FEMA to ensure this happens.

When emergencies strike -- hurricanes, floods, fires, the opioid crisis -- FQHCs answer the call, providing immediate care where it is needed most. Now, during the COVID-19 emergency, Missouri's Health Centers are again leading by opening testing sites and providing ongoing health services mostly through telehealth. Missouri Health Centers have rapidly transformed their operations to respond -- despite drastic drops in patient revenue.

Missouri FQHC health care teams are strategically placed to help mitigate the growth of COVID-19 in their communities. With our local hospital partners, FQHCs create a framework to lessen the burden on emergency rooms and intensive care units. Through engaging their patients *via* telehealth and establishing testing protocols, our health centers now direct those with high disease burden to hospitals or tertiary care facilities and assure that moderately ill patients seek quarantine at home. This ultimately increases capacity for the entire system and moderates the demand for scarce hospital resources.

Like all providers on the front line, Missouri FQHCs need protective supplies and equipment. As FEMA coordinates the management of this disaster at the federal level, I specifically urge you to strategically direct and prioritize the needed protective supplies and equipment to the FQHCs in our state. The National Association of Community Health Centers -- our national voice for community health centers -- has delivered a letter to the FEMA Administrator Peter Gaynor and Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar echoing this call. Through a coordinated approach, we are respectfully asking the response leads at the state and federal levels to ensure FQHCs have the necessary supplies and equipment to protect their staff and patients.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Joseph Pierle
CEO