

May 6, 2020

Delivered electronically

RE: Minnesota Association of Community Health Centers Comments on HF2128-Omnibus HHS Budget Bill

Dear Members of the Conference Committee:

Thank you so much for your work on the HHS omnibus finance bill. We know your work is critical to serving Minnesotans in need.

As you know, Community Health Centers are committed to providing access to primary medical, dental and behavioral health care for uninsured patients and public health care program enrollees. Community Health Centers, work with communities who disproportionately face health disparities to improve outcomes, and provide wrap around services that meet patients where they are.

To achieve equity in healthcare is we must employ the totality options as we focus on person centered care. We believe this includes an audio-only option as a part of a robust telehealth program. Health Centers will use audio-only to complement, not replace the essential face-to-face encounters. This added functionality will enable individuals the choice to access care when how best meets their needs.

The use audio-only allows patients' access to providers with flexibility in scheduling. If a patient has an hourly job, they can connect with a provider on a break from work without the technology required for a video conference, and without requiring them to lose income.

For individuals who are unsheltered, or lacking in the necessary technology to video conference, audio-only capacity allows continued access to care. This is not just an issue in larger metropolitan areas, but also in rural areas where broadband access is limited.

We appreciate that the proposed study that to evaluate how audio-only can be used in a post-pandemic world. We urge you to consider not sun-setting this important provision while the study is underway. In addition, we recommend that a neutral, third-party conduct the study to consider national models as we want to ensure that no person is left with inadequate access to service.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Rochelle Westlund
Director of Public Policy