

Friends of the Health Resources and Services Administration Coalition
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Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies
Concerning the fiscal year 2019 budget for the Health Resources and Services Administration

Friends of HRSA is a nonpartisan coalition of 170 national organizations representing tens of millions of public health and health care professionals, academicians and consumers invested in the Health Resources and Services Administration's mission to improve health and achieve health equity. HRSA is the primary federal agency responsible for improving health, and does so by supporting access to quality health services, a skilled workforce and innovative programs. We are grateful for the increases provided for HRSA programs in the FY 2018 omnibus, but HRSA's discretionary budget authority is far too low to effectively address the nation's current health care needs. Additional funding will allow HRSA to fill preventive and primary health care gaps and to build upon the achievements of HRSA's 90-plus programs and more than 3,000 grantees. We urge Congress to continue their support for these important programs and we recommend providing \$8.56 billion for HRSA's total discretionary budget authority in FY 2019.

Our nation's ability to deliver services that meet the pressing health challenges of the 21st century is essential for a healthy and thriving population. The nation faces a shortage of health professionals, and a growing and aging population which will demand more health care. We must make deliberate investments in robust systems of care, and a high-performing workforce ready to respond to the nation's current health demands and prepared to take on unexpected health needs as they arise. Providing additional funding to HRSA's discretionary budget will allow the agency to address these challenges. The agency is continuously exploring and supporting efforts that drive quality care, better leverage existing investments and achieve improved health outcomes at a lower cost. HRSA's programs have been successful in improving the health of people with complex health, behavioral and social needs who traditionally have poor health outcomes.

HRSA operates programs in every state and U.S. territory. The agency is a national leader in improving the health of Americans by addressing the supply, distribution and diversity of health professionals and supporting training in contemporary practices, and providing quality health services. HRSA programs work in coordination with each other to maximize resources and leverage efficiencies. For example, Area Health Education Centers, a health professions training program, was originally authorized at the same time as the National Health Service Corps to increase the number of primary care providers at health centers and other direct providers of health care services for underserved areas and populations. AHECs play an integral role to recruit providers into primary health careers, diversify the workforce and develop a passion for service to the underserved among future providers.

HRSA's programs also work synergistically across the federal government to enhance health outcomes. Through maternal and child health programs, HRSA has contributed to the decrease in infant mortality rates, a widely used indicator of the nation's health. While HRSA has

contributed to driving down the national rate, which is now at a historic low of 5.8 deaths per 1,000 live births, it would not have been possible without the effort of other federal public health programs, including those that address perinatal care, preventive health screenings, cessation programs for tobacco and other substances, healthy eating and physical activity programs, among other efforts.

HRSA grantees also play an active role in addressing emerging health challenges. For example, HRSA's grantees provide outreach, education, prevention, screening and treatment services for populations affected by the health emergencies such as the Zika virus and the opioid epidemic. However, much of this work required emergency supplemental funding to increase capacity in health centers, support additional National Health Service Corps providers to deliver care and expand maternal and child health services. Strong, sustained funding would allow HRSA to quickly and effectively respond to emerging and unanticipated future health needs across the U.S., while continuing to address persistent health challenges.

Our recommendation is based on the need to continue improving the health of Americans and to provide HRSA with the resources needed to pave the way for new achievements by supporting critical HRSA programs, including:

- **Primary care programs** support more than 10,400 health center sites in every state and territory, improving access to preventive and primary care for more than 27 million people in geographic areas with few health care providers. Health centers coordinate a full spectrum of health services including medical, dental, vision, behavioral and social services. Close to half of all health centers serve rural populations. For over 50 years, health centers have delivered comprehensive, cost-effective care for people who otherwise may not have obtained care and have demonstrated their ability to reduce the use of costlier providers of care.
- **Health workforce programs** support the education, training, scholarship and loan repayment of primary care physicians, nurses, oral health professionals, optometrists, physician assistants, nurse practitioners, clinical nurse specialists, public health personnel, mental and behavioral health professionals, pharmacists and other allied health providers. With an emphasis on primary care and training in interdisciplinary, community-based settings, these are the only federal programs focused on filling the gaps in the supply of health professionals, as well as improving the geographic distribution and diversity of the workforce so that health professionals are well-equipped to care for the nation's changing needs and demographics.
- **Maternal and child health programs**, including the Title V Maternal and Child Health Block Grant, Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities, Healthy Start and others support initiatives designed to promote optimal health, reduce disparities, combat infant mortality, prevent chronic conditions and improve access to quality health care. MCH programs help assure that nearly all babies born in the U.S. are screened for a range of serious genetic or metabolic diseases and that coordinated long-term follow-up is available for babies with a positive screen. They also help improve early identification and coordination of care for children with sensory disorders, autism and other developmental disabilities.

- **HIV/AIDS programs** provide the largest source of federal discretionary funding assistance to states and communities most severely affected by HIV/AIDS. The Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program delivers comprehensive care, prescription drug assistance and support services to 550,000 people impacted by HIV/AIDS. Additionally, the program provides education and training for health professionals treating people with HIV/AIDS and works toward addressing the disproportionate impact of HIV/AIDS on racial and ethnic minorities. People receiving care through the Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program achieve significantly higher viral suppression compared to the national average, which is central to preventing new HIV infections.
- **Title X** ensures access to a broad range of reproductive, sexual and related preventive health services for more than 4 million women, men and adolescents, with priority given to low-income individuals. Services include patient education and counseling for family planning; provision of contraceptive methods; cervical and breast cancer screenings; sexually transmitted disease prevention education, testing and referral; and pregnancy diagnosis. This program helps improve maternal and child health outcomes and promotes healthy families.
- **Rural health programs** improve access to care for people living in rural areas. The Office of Rural Health Policy serves as the nation's primary advisor on rural policy issues, conducts and oversees research on rural health issues and administers grants to support health care delivery in rural communities. Rural health programs are designed to support community-based disease prevention and health promotion projects, help rural hospitals and clinics implement new technologies and strategies and build health system capacity in rural and frontier areas.
- Special programs include the Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network, the National Marrow Donor Program, the C.W. Bill Young Cell Transplantation Program and National Cord Blood Inventory. These programs maintain and facilitate organ marrow and cord blood donation, transplantation and research, along with efforts to promote awareness and increase organ donation rates. Special programs also include the Poison Control Program, the nation's primary defense against injury and death from poisoning for over 50 years. Poison control centers contribute to significantly decreasing a patient's length of stay in a hospital and save the federal government \$662.8 billion each year in medical costs and lost productivity.

We urge you to consider HRSA's central role in strengthening the nation's health and advise you to adopt our FY 2019 request of \$8.56 billion for HRSA's discretionary budget authority. Thank you for the opportunity to submit our recommendation to the subcommittee.