

On the Hill

House and Senate Pass Disaster Aid Bill that Includes Funding for Health Centers

After many months of negotiations, the Senate and House have passed a [\\$19.1 billion disaster aid bill](#) to support ongoing disaster responses in areas impacted by hurricanes, flooding, tornadoes and wildfires in 2018 and 2019. The bill specifically provides \$80 million for Community Health Centers to support construction, equipment purchase, operational support, and other projects as necessary in those impacted areas. The bill now heads to the President's desk for his signature, which he has publicly stated he will do.

Health Center CEO Testifies Before Congress About Health Care Safety Net Programs

Earlier this week, Dean Germano, CEO of Shasta Community Health Center, [testified before the Energy & Commerce Committee](#) about the importance of the Community Health Center program, the Teaching Health Center program, & the National Health Service Corps. [The June 4th hearing](#) provided an important opportunity to highlight the crucial role of health centers in communities across the country, and their efforts to improve health outcomes and bend the cost curve. You can find a portion of Germano's statement below and a link to his written testimony [here](#).

"Federal investments supporting the health center system of care must be sustained in a long term and stable manner to ensure health centers' ability to plan for the future, recruit staff, and expand services for patients, as well as to reduce the uncertainty caused by year-to-year renewals of this critical investment in access to care."

House Leaders Make Progress on FY20 Appropriations Bills

Next week, House leaders are slated to vote on a [five-bill FY20 spending package](#), known as an omnibus, that costs roughly \$1 trillion and will include funding for national defense, education, health care, and foreign affairs among other issues. The spending package includes the labor-health-education spending bill that contains \$1.68B for Community Health Centers – a \$50 million increase from last year that would help health centers increase the use of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) among people at high risk of HIV transmission. Next week's vote is expected to be the first step in Congress' effort to keep the government open past September 30. [Click here to read more](#) about the spending package and next week's vote.

New Bill Would Improve Access to Dental Care for Seniors, People with Disabilities, and Low-Income Populations

Senator Bob Casey (D-PA) and the Senate Special Committee on Aging **introduced the Medicare and Medicaid Dental, Vision, and Hearing Benefit Act of 2019, S.1423**. This represents another milestone in recent efforts to underscore the need for improved coverage of oral health benefits in public health care programs. [S.1423](#) would **add a dental benefit to Part B of the Medicare program**, ensuring seniors and people with disabilities have access to the dental services they need to manage chronic conditions and support their oral and overall health. It would also provide **increased reimbursement to states that choose to cover adult dental benefits in their Medicaid program**. Because adult dental benefits are currently optional for state Medicaid programs, [S.1423](#) would provide a financial incentive for states to cover the comprehensive dental services people with Medicaid coverage need. This would also open up an opportunity for oral health advocates to stress the importance and cost effectiveness of dental benefits in their states' Medicaid program.

The undersigned national partners in the Oral Health Progress and Equity Network (OPEN) are excited to see [S.1423](#), which enhances the public perception of oral health as integral for overall health, integrates dental benefits with other health coverage, and opens the door for millions of Americans to access the care they need. This bill adds more energy to the on-going conversation about the importance of adult and older adult oral health. Thank you all for your continued work on this issue!