

More minority patients getting vaccinated at community health centers, say federal officials

By

Dan Diamond

August 9, 2021 at 8:34 a.m. EDT

Federally funded community health centers have administered nearly 14 million doses of [coronavirus](#) vaccines, including about 9 million doses to minority patients, the Biden administration is set to announce Monday.

Nearly half of the doses have been administered through the [Health Center COVID-19 Vaccine Program](#), an initiative overseen by the Department of Health and Human Services, according to federal data shared with The Washington Post.

“I’ve seen firsthand the critical role health centers play in serving communities, particularly to help fight the pandemic. After quickly transitioning from providing in-person primary care to offering telehealth services, they continue to test, vaccinate, and act as lifelines to communities disproportionately hit by covid-19,” HHS Secretary Xavier Becerra said in a statement.

The federal government funds about 1,400 community health centers, which provided care to about 1 in 11 people across the nation last year. The Biden administration has viewed the centers, which are disproportionately located in rural and underserved communities, as a key hub to reach Americans who have been slow to get vaccinated, and announced more than \$7 billion in health center funding through the American Rescue Plan.

“We’re locating our federal vaccination sites in places where we think there’s the greatest need to fill,” said then-White House senior adviser Andy Slavitt in April, touting the community health center vaccine program.

While the centers represent a small share of the [350 million-plus vaccine doses](#) administered across the United States, their vaccine program is “a major part of ongoing efforts to address the racial disparities in covid-19 vaccinations that have emerged, especially for Hispanic people,” the Kaiser Family Foundation concluded in an [analysis](#) in June.

More than 90 percent of the health centers’ patients live at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty guidelines, and more than 60 percent are racial or ethnic minorities, the federal government said earlier this year.

[Lack of health services and transportation impede access to vaccine in communities of color]

The health centers’ vaccine program — a joint initiative between the Health Resources and Services Administration, which oversees the facilities, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention — also has administered 1.6 million vaccine doses to patients

with limited English proficiency, 217,000 doses to residents of public housing and 155,000 doses to patients experiencing homelessness, according to the data set to be released on Monday.

Health centers are marking [National Health Center Week](#), with an array of [events](#) intended to boost vaccinations and address other community health needs. Community health centers “are invaluable to ensuring that our nation’s underserved populations, especially individuals and families living in poverty, rural communities, and communities of color are able to receive the care they need and deserve,” President Biden said in a [proclamation](#) issued on Friday.