

SAFETY NET HOSPITALS NEED TARGETED COVID-19 RELIEF

Safety net hospitals continue to remain on the front lines of the COVID-19 public health emergency. The pandemic took its heaviest toll on the patients and communities these hospitals serve—traditionally marginalized individuals experiencing socioeconomic and structural barriers to care. Sociodemographic factors greatly influence patient health status, making safety net hospitals' patients most at risk, as COVID-19 is especially harmful to those with underlying health conditions.

Further, safety net hospitals continue to go above and beyond by realigning capacity and suspending elective procedures to accommodate more COVID-19 patients; distributing vaccines through innovative programs to overcome hesitancy, including among historically underrepresented populations; and providing telehealth services to patients and to support other hospitals.

These hospitals, which operate on much slimmer financial margins than other hospitals, experience COVID-19-related challenges acutely and need more support to best serve the patients most in need. This was especially true as the delta and omicron variants swept through the country in the fall of 2021 and early winter of 2022.

SAFETY NET HOSPITALS STILL STRUGGLE

Throughout the pandemic, safety net hospitals have faced case surges that overwhelmed their capacity, shortages of supplies and personnel, and an uncertain financial future.

Although cases are declining nationwide, these hospitals have not recuperated from the effects of the pandemic on their finances and still need additional resources. For example:

- patient volumes at many safety net hospitals are not back to pre-COVID levels;
- many safety net hospitals suspended elective procedures in the past six months due to the delta and omicron variants; and
- workforce costs continue to soar and are expected to continue at these levels. One safety net hospital reported a \$41 million shortfall already for 2022. Another hospital expects an \$80 million shortfall this year due to unbudgeted workforce costs. Another hospital shared that its staffing costs have increased by 300 percent in the past six months.

OUR ASK

To ensure safety net hospitals can continue operating on the front lines and serve the nation's most underrepresented patients and marginalized communities, we ask for \$7 billion in targeted funding for safety net hospitals.