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## **Community Health Centers Fill the Gap in Helene's Aftermath – More Support Urgently Needed for Recovery**

**Oct. 18, 2024** - Hurricane Helene wreaked havoc on infrastructure, homes, and businesses across Western North Carolina, and severely impacted Western N.C. Community Health Centers (CHCs) and the patients they serve.

### **Helene's Impact on CHCs**

Several Western North Carolina health centers experienced significant damage to facilities, including:

- [Blue Ridge Health](#),
- [High Country Community Health](#),
- [Mountain Community Health Partnership](#), and
- [WestLife Wellness](#)

These health center property losses have a heavy impact on community access to care. For instance, High Country Community Health lost a dental clinic with seven exam chairs, which was the only local place for uninsured people to seek affordable dental care in Avery County.

At least seven other health center organizations in the impacted area – including [Western North Carolina Community Health Services](#) and [Appalachian Mountain Health](#), both serving the Asheville area, and [Hot Springs Health Program](#) serving Madison County, have experienced moderate to severe operational disruptions due to utility outages and other storm-related impacts.

### **CHC Heroes Respond to Helene Crisis**

While suffering immense property and personal losses due to this unprecedented natural disaster, CHC staff rose to bring care to communities in need during this unprecedented natural disaster by:

- Volunteering to care for people living in temporary shelters and patients evacuated to the Hickory airport from other facilities

- Performing door-to-door well checks in public housing and senior housing communities
- Working quickly to reopen clinics and pharmacies, and to connect patients with needed medicine and supplies, even making deliveries to patients in some areas by ATV
- Bringing mobile health units into hard-hit rural communities with care providers and supplies

Health center staff continue to provide comprehensive medical, mental health care, and dental care to impacted communities, while also working to connect patients to food, medicine, water, and other essential supplies.

"Community Health Centers have shown incredible resilience and commitment to their communities," said Chris Shank, President & CEO of NCCHCA. "Even as many of them dealt with personal and professional losses, they remained focused on providing life-saving care to the people who rely on them."

While CHCs continue to deliver essential services, the scale of the devastation and the impact of disrupted operations means long-term financial support will be essential to support local recovery – and to retain the rural health care workforce in North Carolina.

- **Immediate relief funding** is needed to restore full operations, replace equipment, and support patients and staff who have lost everything. With closures impacting cash flow, nonprofit Community Health Centers also need adequate resources to maintain the rural health care workforce so impacted communities aren't left without the providers they depend on while they recover.
- **Long term recovery funding**, including for capital needs and future resilience, will be necessary to restore and sustain availability of essential health services in the region. Without critical investments, we anticipate significant long-term impacts on provider recruitment and retention, provider wellness, availability of mental health services, and access to housing and jobs for our patient populations.

"We are grateful for the immediate support we've received, but the road to recovery is long," Shank said. "We call on state and federal leaders to provide additional resources to help rebuild the health care infrastructure in Western North Carolina."

### **NCCHCA and CHC Response**

NCCHCA has been coordinating closely with impacted health centers, as well as state and federal agencies to advocate for health centers and connect them with critical supplies.

The Association has also submitted a request to the North Carolina General Assembly for a relief funding package to support long-term Health Center recovery.

Supported by partners and other community health centers in the state like [Kintegra Health](#), which donated use of its mobile unit and its warehouse for supply collection and distribution, NCCHCA will continue its work to ensure health centers have the resources and support needed to continue their work.

### **CHC Disaster Relief Fund**

To support ongoing recovery, NCCHCA has launched a group [CHC Disaster Relief Fund](#) to provide financial assistance to health centers and their staff as they rebuild. Donations to the NCCHCA Disaster Relief Fund will reach multiple impacted health centers with needed resources as they continue providing affordable medical and mental health care, medications, and hope to impacted communities.

See more about how CHCs stepped into the breach to serve their communities after Helene in this PDF: <https://www.ncchca.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Community-Health-Centers-on-the-Frontlines-of-Helene-10.23.24.pdf>