

# ACU POLICY PAPER

## National Health Service Corps Funding



### BACKGROUND

The National Health Service Corps (NHSC) program, established in 1972, is designed to incentivize primary care professionals – including physicians, nurse practitioners, dentists, mental and behavioral health professionals, physician assistants, certified nurse-midwives, and dental hygienists – to work in underserved areas in both rural and urban communities. In exchange for their service, the program helps to alleviate the burden of debt accumulated during the course of their health education through scholarship and loan repayment programs.

Since its founding, the NHSC has placed 50,000 providers in urban and rural underserved communities, with more than 10,000 placements in the last year alone. The NHSC has proven to be a successful, sustainable solution to the shortage of providers in thousands of communities across the United States. According to the Health Resources and Services Administration, 82 percent of NHSC clinicians who complete their service obligation continue to practice in a shortage area up to one year later, and a majority continue to practice in a shortage area for more than 10 years after completing their service obligation. Despite this level of service, it would still take an additional 20,891 providers to meet the existing need in all federally-designated Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs).

### CURRENT FUNDING

Today, the NHSC is funded at \$310 million through a dedicated trust fund that was extended through FY2019. However, only 40% of Loan Repayment applicants and a mere 10% of Scholarship applicants are granted awards at this level of funding. Further, the trust fund extension was implemented five months after previous funding expired for the program, which caused delays and disruption throughout the program. Without Congressional action before September 30, 2019, the funding for the NHSC will expire once again, causing an immediate and severe impact in underserved areas across the country. The potential lapse in funding will result in a dramatically decreased field strength, jeopardizing access to care for millions of people. It is crucial to continue to fund and grow the NHSC to ensure access to care for millions of people living in shortage areas.

### LEGISLATIVE REQUEST:

We urge Congress to pass legislation that both ensures a sustainable future for the National Health Service Corps and expands it to address the urgent need for primary care in underserved communities across the country.