



**ASSOCIATION OF CLINICIANS
FOR THE UNDERSERVED**

**ANNUAL REPORT
2023**

INTRODUCTION: GROWING THE WORKFORCE, BRINGING OUR VISION TO REALITY

A Message from Our Executive Director

While 2023 brought challenges, it was also a momentous year for ACU and our community, bearing new opportunities, innovations, and growth. The challenges that confronted our network and, more critically, the patients they serve, were many—whether writ large in the impact of Medicaid unwinding and funding uncertainties or writ small in the exhaustion and stress our clinicians and staff faced all too often. But in the tireless work to overcome these obstacles to better care for the patients who need it most, the spirit of our network of healthcare professionals, organizations, and partners never shone more brightly. In our 27 years of supporting your efforts, we've never been more grateful, inspired, or humbled by your ongoing efforts.

As our community evolved this year, so, too, did the **Association of Clinicians for the Underserved** (ACU). We were privileged to celebrate several incredible milestones as we grew strategically and programmatically to support the work of our members and stakeholder network. In 2023, ACU's efforts to advance the health center workforce reached new heights as we partnered with JSI to launch the **Bureau of Primary Health Care Workforce Well-being Technical Assistance** program and collaborated with Abt Associates in a HRSA initiative to begin establishing a **National Health Workforce Institute**. We entered new strategic partnerships with the **National Center for Medical-Legal Partnership** and the **American College of Lifestyle Medicine**. We held our **largest Conference ever** in Washington, D.C., as well as our first **Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Champion Training**. And we advocated tirelessly to preserve and expand the National Health Service Corps while continuing **our partnership** with the Bureau of Health Workforce to better prepare new NHSC members to care for patients in underserved communities.

None of this work would have been possible without the leadership, vision, and dedication of our members, stakeholders, and partners. And as we grow in staff, in programs, and in advocacy, we do so with a strategic plan shaped at every step by the invaluable input of stakeholders like you. Our strategic plan was also informed by ACU's **enduring vision**: *to establish a robust and diverse workforce to help transform communities to achieve health equity for all by leading advocacy, clinical, operational, and equity excellence to develop and support clinicians and the healthcare workforce caring for America's underserved populations.*

Without question, 2024 will bring new challenges as we continue to grapple with a strained and under-resourced workforce as well as shrinking resources to support our patients. But it also brings new opportunities to better support you, and we've never been more inspired to grow, to do more to collaborate with our community, and to make an even bigger impact in the year to come—until the day when health equity is achieved for every community in the United States.



Amanda Pears Kelly
ACU Executive Director

WHO WE ARE: OUR COMMUNITY

A Transdisciplinary Network

For 27 years, the **Association of Clinicians for the Underserved** (ACU) has worked tirelessly to establish a robust and diverse workforce to help transform communities to achieve health equity for all. Incorporated in 1996, ACU's network arose from alumni and members of the **National Health Service Corps** (NHSC).

Today, ACU is the leading advocate for the NHSC and a national voice for the health center workforce. A transdisciplinary **membership organization**, we lead advocacy, clinical, operational, and equity excellence to develop and support clinicians and the healthcare workforce caring for America's medically underserved communities. From our headquarters in Washington, D.C., we reach a dedicated network of clinicians and organizations across the United States.



**ASSOCIATION OF CLINICIANS
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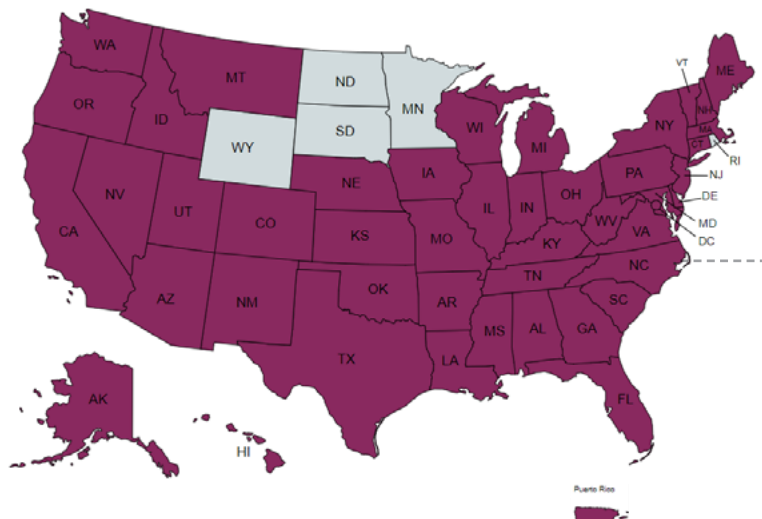


Our Collective Community Includes

Organizations, Individuals, & Advocates

ACU unites a **diverse community** of health centers, primary care associations, free clinics, and health departments, as well as healthcare professionals, students, and health equity advocates from across the U.S.

Organizational and Individual
Members in 2023 hailed from the
following states (in plum).



A photograph of a woman with glasses speaking at a podium during a presentation. A man in a suit stands to her left. The scene is viewed from the audience, with several rows of chairs visible in the foreground. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent purple filter.

PROGRAMS & PARTNERSHIPS

THE STAR² CENTER

Working closely with the Bureau of Primary Health Care, our **Solutions, Training, and Assistance for Recruitment and Retention (STAR²) Center** is the leading national organization working to build and sustain a robust health center workforce by providing resources, trainings, and technical assistance for health centers, primary care associations, health center-controlled networks, and other organizations.



Highlights of the STAR² Center's 2023 activities include:

Virtual and In-Person Trainings

72

Trainings

3,169+

Attendees

4.4/5

Satisfaction Rating

** Some attendance data unavailable.*

Learning Collaboratives

22

Sessions

524

Attendees

Including: Oral Health Workforce Learning Collaborative, C-Suite Learning Network, Fall 2023 Recruitment Boot Camp: Mental Health Staff Edition, and Recruitment Boot Camp 5.0.

THE STAR² CENTER (Cont.)

Selected Resources & Publications

Health Center Onboarding Checklist

Downloaded over 1,400 times in 2023 alone, this [robust checklist](#) provides health centers with a comprehensive structure and process for welcoming and integrating new hires and includes an editable template and essential supporting documents.

Equal Pay for Work of Equal Value: Establishing Pay Equity Principles to Advance Workforce Financial Wellness

This [white paper](#) examines existing literature to detail organizational best practices that champion compensation equity to help health centers strengthen their workforce.

Selected Other New Publications

- [The Growing Provider Shortage: Building the Case for Developing an HP-ET Program](#)
- [Working with Minority-Serving Institutions to Enhance and Diversify Recruitment Pathways](#)
- [Building a Resilient & Trauma-Informed Workforce Factsheet](#)
- [C-Suite Toolkit: Health Professions Education and Training for Recruitment and Retention](#)

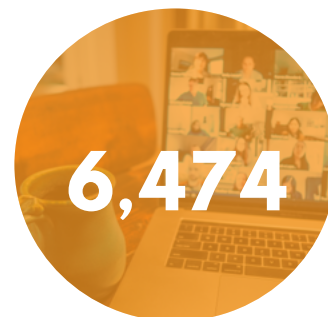
Recruitment & Retention Data Profile Dashboards

These annually updated, [comprehensive resources](#) help health centers assess their data, compare against state and national trends, and reach their recruitment and retention goals.

STAR² Center Talks Workforce Success Podcast

This [podcast's fifth season](#) explored success stories from organizations which successfully used, disseminated, and/or implemented practices, strategies, tools, and more from the STAR² Center.

Resource Downloads at chcworkforce.org



2023 WORKFORCE SUMMIT

Virtual 2023 Biennial Workforce Summit

On May 23-24, ACU's STAR² Center, Community Health Center, Inc., and the National Association of Community Health Centers united 228 unique attendees (in one day alone) from numerous CHCs and PCAs for a free, two-day CME-accredited [virtual event](#) convening diverse teams and guest speakers for two days of workforce focused learning and networking opportunities.



NEW STRATEGIC WORKFORCE INITIATIVES

As the healthcare workforce persists to overcome new challenges to advance health equity for all, ACU has expanded our programs to better support the CHC workforce with innovative technical assistance and training opportunities, including two major new partnerships to drive federal initiatives to support health center staff well-being and strengthen collaboration between stakeholders in our shared work.

The Bureau of Primary Health Care Workforce Well-being Technical Assistance (TA) Initiative

In late 2023, ACU entered a strategic partnership with JSI to undertake a new **Bureau of Primary Health Care** (BPHC) initiative to help address health centers' unique needs, informed by the HRSA Health Center **Workforce Well-being Survey**, to boost their healthcare staff's well-being and build a resilient workforce. The **robust new program** offers diverse training and technical assistance offerings which include communities of practice, personalized coaching, and a dedicated resource hub—all united by a singular focus on helping health centers build and sustain a strong, resilient workforce to better care for their communities.

Launching with a **kickoff presentation** in November 2023, the initiative has already begun hosting **informative webinars** for the CHC community and launched three upcoming communities of practice to assist health centers in addressing burnout, improving job satisfaction, and building diverse workplace cultures to support workplace well-being.



The National Healthcare Workforce Institute



ACU's leading role in supporting the health center workforce expanded still further as we partnered with Abt Associates in an evolving **Health Resources & Services Administration** initiative to establish a **National Health Workforce Institute**.

Designed to advance cutting-edge practices in health workforce recruitment and retention, the Institute will serve to strengthen relationships between HRSA and those addressing workforce issues in underserved communities, to amplify HRSA's impact by collaborating and connecting key partners across federal agencies, and elevate promising practices in workforce recruitment and retention training and technical assistance at sites working to address workforce shortages. The first of its kind, the National Health Workforce Institute stands to organize and coalesce the invaluable and diverse partners supporting healthcare workforce across HRSA and key stakeholders.

NHSC EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVE: ADVANCING CLINICIAN WELLNESS & HEALTH EQUITY

Supporting the National Health Service Corps

In 2021, ACU partnered with Abt Associates on a **Bureau of Health Workforce initiative** to prepare National Health Service Corps (NHSC) participants for the demands of working in health professional shortage areas. In 2023, ACU coordinated and conducted 20 webinars for individuals participating in the NHSC Students to Services Loan Repayment Program and Scholarship Program and their NHSC-Approved site staff. ACU hosted and updated webpages with information about these webinars and related publications that were released throughout the year.



Key Program Figures



Webinars



**Executive
Summaries**



Infographics



Guides

NHSC EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVE: ADVANCING CLINICIAN WELLNESS & HEALTH EQUITY (Cont.)

The Program Helped NHSC Clinicians Better Understand:

Clinician Wellbeing & Self-Care

The initiative educated participants about the drivers, symptoms, and consequences of clinician burnout and coping strategies to mitigate its impacts. Trainings highlighted burnout self-assessment tools and ways NHSC participants can work with leadership staff to make organizational changes to reduce burnout.

Fostering Resiliency at the Organizational Level

Participants learned about organizational approaches to cultivate clinician resiliency and create supportive work environments, with a focus on protecting clinician health and well-being during crises.

Health Inequities and Social Determinants of Health

The initiative showed NHSC participants how to identify health inequities in clinical practices and communities and strategies to address those inequities, including the use of community partnerships. Resources also provided tools to screen for social determinants of health and interventions to address and reduce those determinants.

Continued Evolution in 2024

Drawing on lessons learned from the program’s first year, the NHSC Empowerment Initiative plans numerous changes to improve its effectiveness in 2024, such as:

UPDATING RESOURCES

Program staff will update all resources based on new data and literature.

REBRANDING & PROMOTION

Renaming to *NHSC Empowerment Initiative: Advancing Clinician Wellness & Health Equity*.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

The program will add an evaluation component based on ACU recommendations.

JUSTICE, EQUITY, DIVERSITY, & INCLUSION

Helping Health Centers Work Toward JEDI

ACU strives to achieve **justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion** (JEDI) both internally and throughout the health center workforce and broader healthcare sector. Integral to ACU’s mission, our JEDI program conducted numerous educational seminars—including the first **JEDI Champion Training**—across the U.S. to help primary care associations and health centers integrate anti-racist, inclusive workforce strategies in 2023. The program also unveiled new educational **JEDI e-courses** on foundational concepts and held an in-depth JEDI Learning Collaborative.



Trainings Conducted

including ACU & STAR² Center trainings

Organizations Represented

including CHCs, PCAs, and other organizations



JEDI Champion Training

On November 7-8 in Nashville, TN, ACU held its first **JEDI Champion training**. Building on ACU’s JEDI Champion curriculum, this two-day symposium equipped staff and leaders in the healthcare industry with information, skills, and tools to build energy and momentum to advance justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion at work, while also building a network of peers and allies.



Attendees

*including 11 CHCs, two PCAs,
and other organizations*



Average Knowledge Gain & Satisfaction Rating

JEDI (Cont.)

Learning Collaboratives

ACU’s JEDI program convened diverse administrative and clinical leaders interested in establishing or enhancing JEDI efforts in their organizations for our JEDI Learning Collaborative. Exploring budgets, action plans, metrics, and other topics, the sessions provided a space for leaders to discuss challenges and successful strategies with peers.



Satisfaction Rating
among participants

Participants



JEDI Orientation Series for Healthcare Workers

In 2023, ACU launched its free **JEDI Orientation Series for Healthcare Workers** to help health centers train healthcare workers and establish a baseline of understanding about important JEDI concepts.

Understanding Racism in Care

This course describes ways that racism manifests in healthcare, explores racism as a structural determinant of health, and introduces the concepts of bias, prejudice, and discrimination.

Having Tough Conversations: Creating a Safe Space Filled with Grace

This course is helpful for creating a culture where all can speak honestly about advancing JEDI in organizations and communities.



**E-Course Learners
Enrolled**

EYE HEALTH & VISION CARE

Healthy vision is crucial to overall health, but many historically marginalized communities, including those served by federally qualified health centers, have little access to **eye health and vision care**. ACU is leading the charge to increase access to these services for medically underserved populations with partners across the U.S. Supported by the Centene Foundation for Quality Healthcare, ACU provided **technical assistance** and \$150,000 in grants to help six health centers start or expand services in 2023.

Key Achievements at ACU’s FQHC Vision Grantees (2021-2022)



Unique Patients Seen



Comprehensive Eye Exams Completed



Pairs of Glasses Prescribed



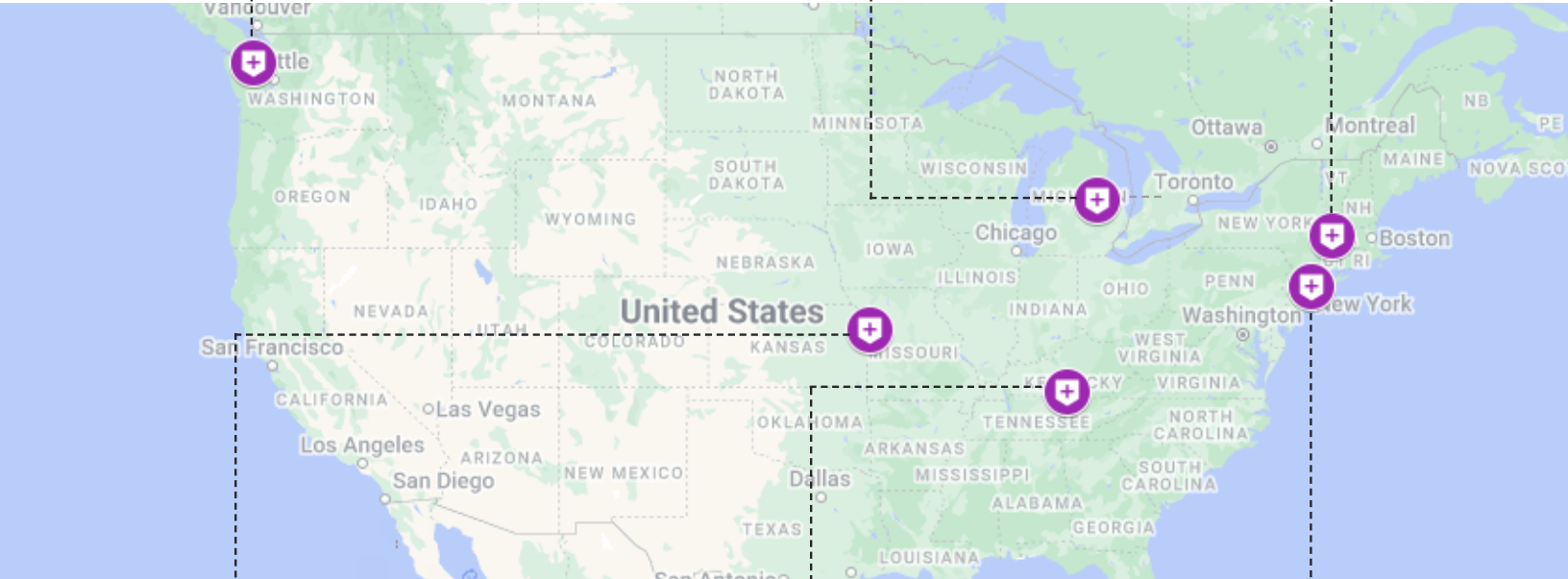
Referrals Made to Specialists

Recipients Included

North Olympic Healthcare Network
Port Angeles, WA

Great Lakes Bay Health Centers
Bay City, MI

Hilltown Community Health Center
Worthington, MA



Swope Health
Kansas City, MO

Cumberland Family Medical Center
Burkesville, KY

HASC Diagnostics
Brooklyn, NY

EYE HEALTH & VISION CARE (Cont.)

Eyes on Access: Virtual Trainings to Expand CHC Vision Care

In 2023, ACU continued its partnership with Prevent Blindness and the National Association of Community Health Centers to present **four webinars** to help health centers start and enhance eye health and vision care services. These presentations and accompanying office hours provided an introduction to **billing for vision services** as well as **children's vision and eye health** at CHCs. ACU also partnered with Prevent Blindness and the Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry for a webinar to introduce optometry students to opportunities for community-based practice at CHCs.



**Virtual
Events**



**Webinar
Attendees**



**Average Satis-
faction Rating**

Selected Resources & Presentations

Toolkit: Integrating Eye Health & Vision Services into Primary Care

www.clinicians.org | January 2023

Building on frequently asked questions from eye health and vision care grantees, ACU developed this toolkit to aid CHCs in moving “From Startup to Success” in integrating vision services into primary care.

Presentation: Advancing Holistic Community-Based Care through Equitable Access to Eye and Vision Care

2023 APHA Expo | November 2023

This presentation introduced attendees to strategies to overcome barriers to expand access to CHC vision services learned in ACU's eye health and vision care initiatives.

SUICIDE SAFER CARE

The Largest Effort in History to Train Primary Care Providers in Suicide Prevention

In 2023, ACU completed the sixth year in the largest effort in history to train primary care providers in suicide prevention—the **Suicide Safer Care (SSC) program**. Generously supported by the Centene Corporation, the SSC program provided resources for, and instructed numerous healthcare professionals in, evidence-based strategies to identify, assess, and care for patients at risk for suicide.

In 2023, **Suicide Safer Care** addressed not only its core focus area but also expanded to help prepare **clinicians in training** with practical suicide prevention strategies, to address **pediatric** and **geriatric suicide prevention**, and addressing the risk of suicide in **healthcare professionals**.

National and State Trainings



20

Webinars & Conference Presentations



1,087

Attendees



4.7/5

Satisfaction Rating
(Webinars & ACU
Conference Session)



12

**PCAs, AHECs, and
Associations Reached**

SUICIDE SAFER CARE (Cont.)

Selected Resource: Spanish SSC Toolkit

Atencion Mas Segura Ante El Riesgo de Suicidio

To better equip clinicians with strategies to identify and care for patients at risk and help address the risk of suicide in Latine populations, ACU partnered with Asociación de Salud Primaria de Puerto Rico to translate “Suicide Prevention in Primary Care: **A Toolkit** for Primary Care Clinicians and Leaders” into Spanish and held an accompanying Spanish-language webinar.

ATENCIÓN MÁS
SEGURA
ANTE EL RIESGO
DE SUICIDIO

Instrumento para las prevenciones de atención primaria y sus equipos

A Vital Partnership for Youth Suicide Prevention



To help address the crisis of youth suicide, ACU partnered with Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBBSA) in 2023 on its **Team: Changing Minds** initiative. In collaboration with BBBSA, Futures Without Violence, and the National Council for Mental Wellbeing, ACU worked to help develop materials leading to the creation of a national network of youth

mental health responders. The partnership also led to the creation of videos on youth suicide prevention and informed best practices in prevention for staff working with youth.

Helping to Prevent Clinician Suicide

To help address the risk of clinician suicide, ACU hosted a webinar on strategies to support clinicians and developed accompanying awareness resources.

National Physician Suicide Awareness Day Toolkit

In honor of National Physician Suicide Awareness Day (Sept. 17), ACU developed **social media resources** to help organizations and individuals raise awareness of the crisis of clinician suicide.



Micro-Learning Video

To advance public awareness of clinician suicide, ACU created a micro-learning video, “**Preventing Suicide in Healthcare Professionals: The Scope of the Problem**,” detailing the crisis and strategies to support clinicians.



Micro-Learning
Video Views

CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE

Advancing Excellence in Health Center Care and Services

ACU's **Centers of Excellence** (COE) initiative works to identify standards for excellence in care for medically underserved communities. In its first year, the COE program explored best practices in JEDI, suicide prevention in primary care, eye health and vision care, and workforce recruitment and retention, creating **four briefs** to assist health centers in quality improvement.

In 2023, ACU's COE program built on these findings to develop a framework of standards to help recognize—and help CHCs achieve—excellence in care, culminating in the creation of four **fact sheets** and accompanying visual assessments to help health centers assess their progress toward excellence in service delivery in key areas.



Fact Sheets Published

Continued Evolution in 2024

As the COE program evolves with lessons learned and continuing interviews with subject matter experts, the initiative will explore the following directions and emerging concerns in the year to come.

MATERNAL/ CHILD HEALTH

The COE program will develop an informative brief and fact sheet on CHC excellence in maternal/child health.

CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

Building on identified standards, the program will work to identify and launch a certification program to recognize leading CHCs with demonstrated excellence.

Assessing Your Health Center: Steps in the Journey to Excellence

Every health center is on its own stage of the journey to excellence in fostering a culture of Suicide Safer Care for patients and staff. The below graphic visualizes four categories of CHC advancement in this area, from beginning to leading. What step of the journey is your health center on?



NEW PROGRAMMATIC PARTNERSHIPS

In 2023, ACU entered exciting new collaborations to help our network advance its understanding of medical-legal partnerships and lifestyle medicine as vital components of our shared work to advance health equity in the historically marginalized communities we serve.

Shifting the Culture of Health with the National Center for Medical-Legal Partnership

ACU and the **National Center for Medical-Legal Partnership** (NCMLP) have announced a **new partnership** to shift the culture of health by helping ACU members leverage medical-legal partnership (MLP) to improve health equity, support access to justice, and strengthen the healthcare workforce. MLP is an evidence-based SDOH intervention that embeds lawyers as specialists in healthcare settings to resolve health-harming legal needs of patients while simultaneously strengthening the healthcare workforce by helping clinicians understand structural barriers, navigate policy issues, and transform institutional practices.

Through this **national partnership**, ACU and NCMLP will raise awareness of the value of MLP to our mutual networks, develop an MLP community of practice to help ACU members learn how to implement effective MLP models with research and peer supports, and engage in policy and legal advocacy to increase justice and health equity as part of health outcomes.



National Center for Medical  Legal Partnership
AT THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

Addressing Health Disparities with the American College of Lifestyle Medicine



ACU recently entered an **exciting partnership** with the **American College of Lifestyle Medicine** (ACLM) to equip hundreds of thousands of physicians with education and training to further their practice in lifestyle medicine and better treat chronic disease in underserved communities. The partnership will help clinicians treat, prevent, and even reverse lifestyle-related chronic diseases that have a disproportionate impact on underserved communities, particularly those of color. Moreover, the work and partnership is done with commitment and foundational alignment to advance each organization's mission to diversify the medical workforce.

The collaboration will allow **ACU and ACLM** to provide **scholarships** to allow **CHC clinicians** to improve their understanding of the importance of lifestyle medicine, to develop and support clinicians underrepresented in medicine, and more.

A woman with short, curly hair is speaking at a podium. She is wearing a patterned blazer and large, square earrings. The image is overlaid with a teal color. The text "NATIONAL CONFERENCES" is written in white, bold, uppercase letters, centered horizontally and partially obscured by a dashed white line.

NATIONAL CONFERENCES

2023 ACU CONFERENCE

Transformation: Elevating Care, Clinicians, & Communities

ACU united 247 clinicians, administrators, advocates, and public health leaders in Washington, D.C., at our **2023 Conference**, “Transformation: Elevating Care, Clinicians, & Communities,” on July 23-26. In four days of learning, networking, advocacy, and fellowship, #ACUConf examined strategies to ensure quality inclusive care for all, to elevate our healthcare workforce, and to advance health equity for all.

In addition to 25 **educational workshops**, the event also featured ACU’s largest Hill Day for advocacy for the National Health Service Corps, pre-conference workshops on JEDI and workforce issues, and more.



Key Figures



Workshops



Tracks



Attendees



**States
Represented**



**Satisfaction Rating for
Educational Sessions**

2023 ACU CONFERENCE (Cont.)

Conference Highlights

LaShyra “Lash” Nolen, medical student and We Got Us founder, received a standing ovation after addressing attendees.

Dr. Rosandra Daywalker accepts the inaugural 2023 Excellence in Health Equity award.

ACU’s Deputy Director of Policy & Advocacy *Jordan Marshall* leads a session on NHSC advocacy.



Attendees take a moment between educational sessions for a quick selfie.

Dr. Luis Padilla of BHW speaks about future directions for the healthcare workforce in an keynote.

ACU’S LARGEST HILL DAY YET

Advocating for the National Health Service Corps

Funding for the National Health Service Corps faces a potentially devastating funding cliff, and our Conference attendees rose to match the moment with tireless advocacy in what became ACU’s largest Hill Day ever on July 26! Over the course of the day, numerous attendees spoke with legislators and their staff on Capitol Hill to remind them of the crucial need to support the NHSC and the more than 20,000 NHSC providers actively providing care to 23 million of our nation’s medically underserved patients.





ADVOCACY & SERVICE

POLICY & ADVOCACY

Standing Up for the NHSC & Healthcare Workforce

ACU is the nation's **leading voice and advocate** for the National Health Service Corps, spearheading the effort to protect and secure funding for this and other vital programs to strengthen the healthcare workforce. ACU also works to lift the voices of patients and clinicians on Capitol Hill, advocating tirelessly for health equity and to make our healthcare system more inclusive, responsive, and accessible. **Join us!**

Selected Policy & Advocacy Activities

Vital Advocacy for the NHSC

ACU achieved unprecedented success in 2021 when we proudly led a coalition of stakeholders to advocate for long-term, stable funding for the National Health Service Corps, ultimately leading to \$1+ billion in new NHSC funding as part of the American Rescue Plan Act, FY2022 appropriations, and investment from the Biden administration.

In 2023, however, the NHSC faced another funding cliff, and ACU once again led a coalition of stakeholders to preserve and expand funding for the Corps and other vital health extender programs via our **#SaveTheNHSC** campaign by mobilizing grassroots advocates, crafting stakeholder letters, advocating on the Hill, and more. Highlights included ACU Executive Director Amanda Pears Kelly's **testimony** at a March U.S. Senate HELP Committee Hearing, as well as ACU's leading role in Senator Durbin and Rubio's introduction of **bipartisan legislation** to extend Corps funding.



Educating Our Community

To keep our network informed on an evolving political landscape, ACU released numerous **fact sheets**, statements, and analyses on NHSC funding, the end of the COVID-19 public health emergency, the proposed FY24 federal budget, and more. This included the publishing of ACU's first **NHSC White Paper** and an accompanying **column** in the *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved*.

Strengthening Access to Care & Eliminating Barriers

In 2023, ACU continued its advocacy for targeted investment to strengthen access to care. Among other activities, ACU joined coalitions and signed on to **letters** calling on Congress to reauthorize a robust Community Health Center Fund at \$5.8 billion annually for three years to effectively improve health outcomes for patients, communities, and our nation.

2023 BOARD OF DIRECTORS



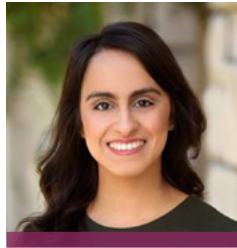
Douglas Olson, MD

President
Connecticut Physician Health Program



Shelley Spires, MHCA

Vice President
Albany Area Primary Health Care



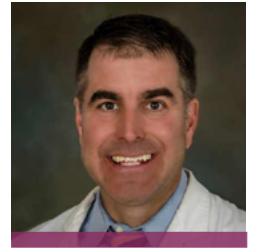
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Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center



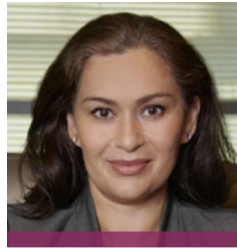
Ashley Colwell, MS, PHR

Director
Illinois Primary Health Care Association



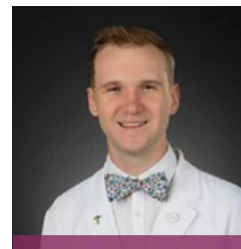
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FOR THE UNDERSERVED

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