



For Immediate Release

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Amida Care Commends Congress for Passing Budget with Funding for Community Health Centers and Other Health-Related Priorities

But Concern Remains About Community Health Centers' Long-Term Future

New York, NY (February 12, 2018) – Amida Care, New York's largest not-for-profit Medicaid Special Needs Health Plan (SNP), issued the following statement on behalf of President and CEO Doug Wirth, commending Congress for passing a budget bill that guarantees funding for community health centers for another two years and funds other crucial health care programs.

“We congratulate members of Congress for passing this budget agreement that helps to provide essential care for nearly 27 million Americans, including 2 million New Yorkers, who otherwise could not afford care. This is the kind of bipartisan cooperation and consensus that represents the values that we, as Americans, stand for -- caring for our friends and neighbors.

The \$7 billion appropriated for community health centers isn't just the right thing to do; it's the smart thing to do. Community health centers provide medical care and social supports to low-income, uninsured and under-insured individuals, many of whom suffer from serious or multiple chronic conditions. Caring for these individuals reduces overall health care costs – such as expensive hospitalizations and emergency room visits.

However, we are concerned that the appropriation doesn't go far enough; community health centers will have to go through the same budget dance in less than two years down the road, creating an uncertain and unstable environment, which often leads to hiring freezes, layoffs, reduced hours of operation, infrastructure problems, and even site closings.

Short-term funding and the uncertainty it creates for community health centers are of particular concern for individuals living with HIV/AIDS and those at greater risk for contracting HIV, such as people battling addiction or living with behavioral health issues, women of color, gay and bisexual men, and people of transgender experience. These individuals rely on community health centers for the culturally-competent and comprehensive health services they need to help bring their viral load to an undetectable level. A person living with HIV who has an undetectable viral load cannot transmit the virus to others.

Between 2008 and 2014, the estimated number of new HIV infections in the U.S. declined 18 percent. But HIV still remains a major health problem that we need to continue to address: last year, 39,782 people in the United States were newly diagnosed with HIV. Community health centers are instrumental in the effort to end the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Community health centers serve over a third of Amida Care members. The viral suppression rate among our HIV-positive members has grown from 60 in 2005 to 78

percent today, compared to the 49 percent national rate. Without stable, long-term funding for community health centers, Congress risks halting – or worse, turning back – the progress made. Ending the HIV/AIDS epidemic will save both lives and taxpayer dollars. Amida Care saved New York State more than \$115 million between 2008 and 2015 by helping members reduce their viral load, ER visits, and avoidable hospitalizations. Preventing one new HIV infection can save the health care system as much as \$500,000 in lifetime medical costs.

Beyond community health center funding, Congress should be applauded for making other crucial investments in health care, particularly the \$6 billion to fund the fight against the opioid and mental health crises, \$2 billion for important research at NIH, and the 10-year appropriation to fund the Children’s Health Insurance Plan (CHIP).

Health care is a right, not a bargaining chip. We urge congressional members on both sides of the aisle to work toward full, long-term funding of community health centers and other essential programs in the future.”

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Amida Care Inc. is a not-for-profit health plan that specializes in providing comprehensive health coverage and coordinated care to New Yorkers with chronic conditions, including HIV and behavioral health disorders, and people who are homeless or of transgender experience (regardless of HIV status). Amida Care has a wide network of health care providers throughout New York City and is the largest Medicaid Special Needs Health Plan (SNP) in New York State. For more information, visit www.amidacareny.org.