

Data Note

December 2021

Key COVID-19 Updates from Twenty Months of Health Center Survey Data

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HRSA's Health Center COVID-19 Survey

Beginning in April 2020, the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) has conducted a [Health Center COVID-19 Survey](#) weekly (or every two weeks, starting in July 2021) to capture data on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the nation's community health centers (see the Appendix for more details on the survey). The Geiger Gibson/RCHN Community Health Foundation Research Collaborative has published [an ongoing series of data notes and policy issue briefs](#) based on national and state summary reports of the Health Center COVID-19 Survey data. In this brief, we present findings from summary data on HRSA-funded health centers from April 3rd, 2020 to December 3rd, 2021, representing 20 months of survey data.

Health centers have tested more than 15 million patients for COVID-19

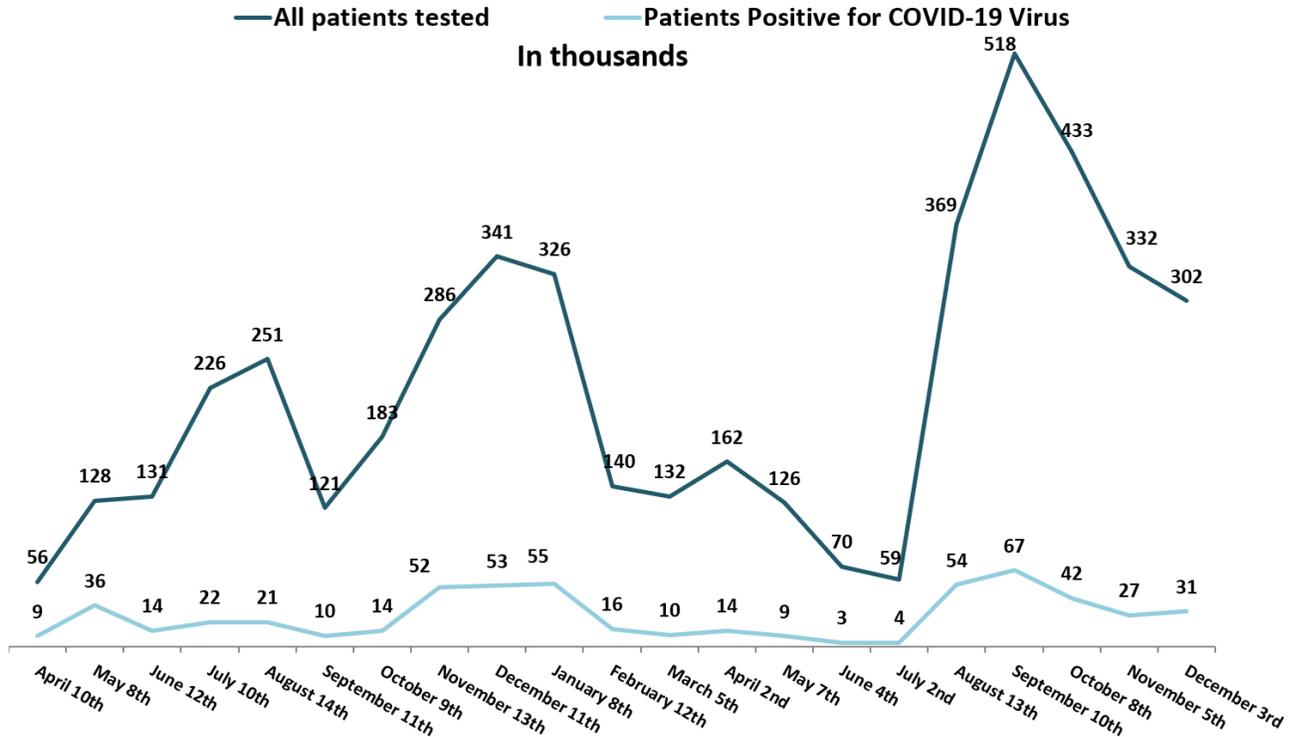
HRSA has reported the number of patients tested for the novel coronavirus (PCR, antigen) and the number who tested positive over 20 months. **Figure 1** illustrates these numbers at approximately monthly intervals from April 2020 to December 2021. The summer and winter 2020 surges in COVID-19 cases can be seen in the increased number of patients tested and those testing positive in those months, while the declines in the spring of 2021 illustrate the generally decreasing case rates and the widespread administration of COVID-19 vaccines. The dramatic increase in tests and positive cases in the summer 2021 months reflects both a change in HRSA's data collection, with the survey changed from once-weekly to every two weeks, and the effect of the surge in cases attributable to the delta variant.

Over the 20 months of testing data, nearly 15.1 million patients were tested for the COVID-19 virus and more than 1.73 million tested positive (**Figure 2**). The average turn-around time for test results has improved; while just ten percent of test results were returned within 24 hours in [July 2020](#), that figure had reached 30 percent as of December 3rd, 2021.

Additionally, from June 2020 to January 1st, 2021, HRSA also reported the number of patients tested for antibodies to the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) and those testing positive (**Figure 2**). Over that period of time, 376,379 patients were tested for antibodies and 68,176 tested positive. As of December 3rd, 2021, [HRSA reported](#) a total of 15,464,396 patients tested for either COVID-19 infection or antibodies and 1,801,539 who tested positive. HRSA also reported the number of staff members who tested positive for the COVID-19 virus from April 2020 to May 2021. Over that time period, nearly 43,000 staff members tested positive for the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2).

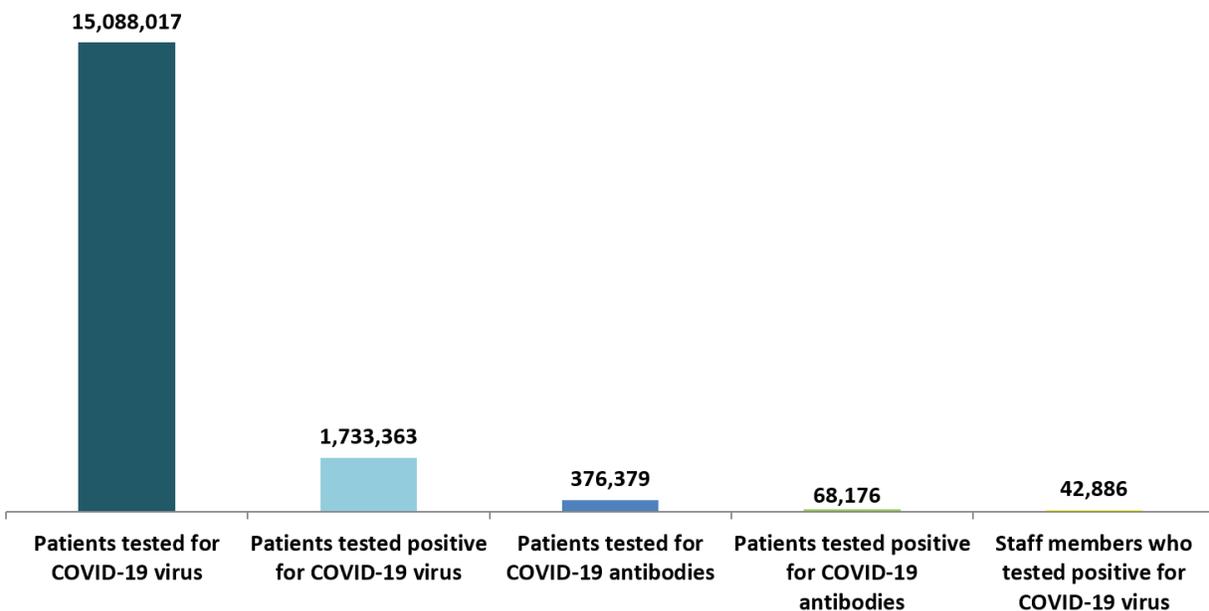
We had [previously noted](#) that in the first 11 months of survey data, racial/ethnic minority patients accounted for a disproportionate share of patients who tested positive for the COVID-19 virus compared to those who received a diagnostic test. Over all COVID-19 diagnostic and antibody tests from April 2020 to December 2021, [HRSA reports](#) that Hispanic patients accounted for 30 percent of patients tested but 37 percent of those who tested positive. More recently, there appears to be less of a racial/ethnic disparity; as of December 3rd, 2021, racial/ethnic minority patients accounted for 56 percent of patients tested for the COVID-19 virus but 46 percent of those who tested positive.

Figure 1. Community Health Center Patients Tested for COVID-19 Infection and Patients Who Tested Positive, April 2020-December 2021



Note: HRSA began reporting COVID-19 testing numbers the second week of the survey (April 10, 2020). Beginning with the July 16, 2021 survey, each survey covers a 2-week period rather than a weekly period. Source: Bureau of Primary Health Care. Health Center COVID-19 Survey. HRSA.

Figure 2. Total Community Health Center Patients Tested for COVID-19 Infection and Antibodies and Patients and Staff Members Who Tested Positive, April 2020-December 2021

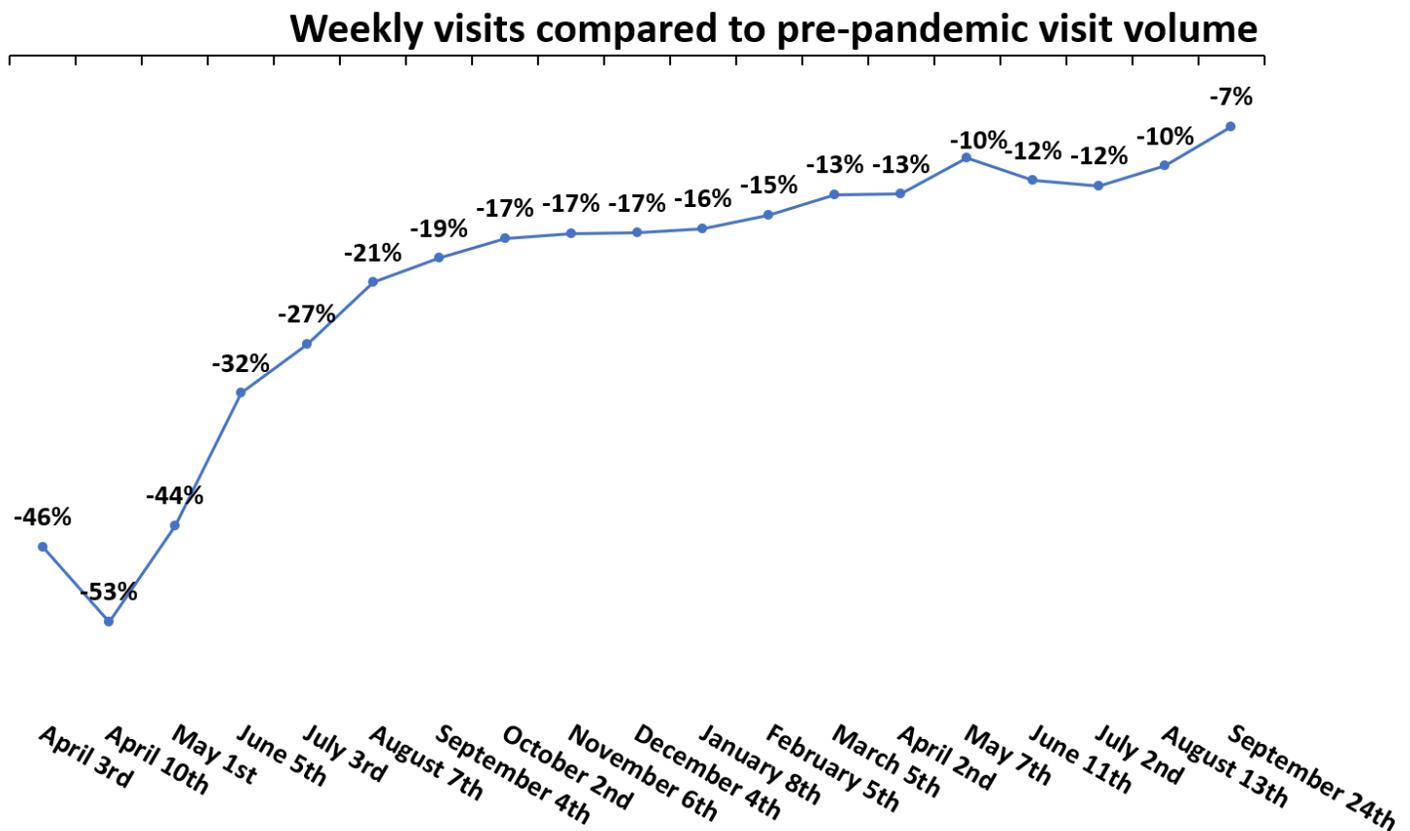


Notes: HRSA began reporting COVID-19 testing numbers the second week of the survey (April 10, 2020). HRSA stopped surveying on the number of staff members with infection after the May 28, 2021 survey. HRSA reported patients tested and testing positive for antibodies from June 2020 to January 2021. Source: Bureau of Primary Health Care. Health Center COVID-19 Survey. HRSA.

Operational capacity is close to pre-pandemic levels, but nearly one in five visits remain virtual

Since the survey's beginning, HRSA has collected data on the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on health centers' operational capacity, monitoring the change in weekly health center visits compared to average pre-pandemic visit volume, the number of closed health center sites, and the share of staff members unable to work. The latter measure improved from 16 percent of staff members unable to work in [April 2020 to two percent a year later](#) (when HRSA stopped reporting on this measure). Similarly, the number of health center sites that were temporarily closed fell from a high of [2,073 in April 2020](#) to 315 as of August 13th, 2021, the last survey period for which this measure was reported. **Figure 3** illustrates the pandemic's effect on weekly (or bi-weekly) visit volume from April 2020 to September 2021, when this measure was last reported. Over this time period, the decline in visit volume, including virtual visits¹, improved from [a decrease of 53 percent](#) to seven percent. HRSA has continued to report the share of visits provided by telehealth from April 2020 to the current report. **Figure 4** shows that virtual visits accounted for [more than half \(54 percent\) of visits](#), on average, in April 2020, but this figure stood at 18 percent as of December 3rd, 2021.

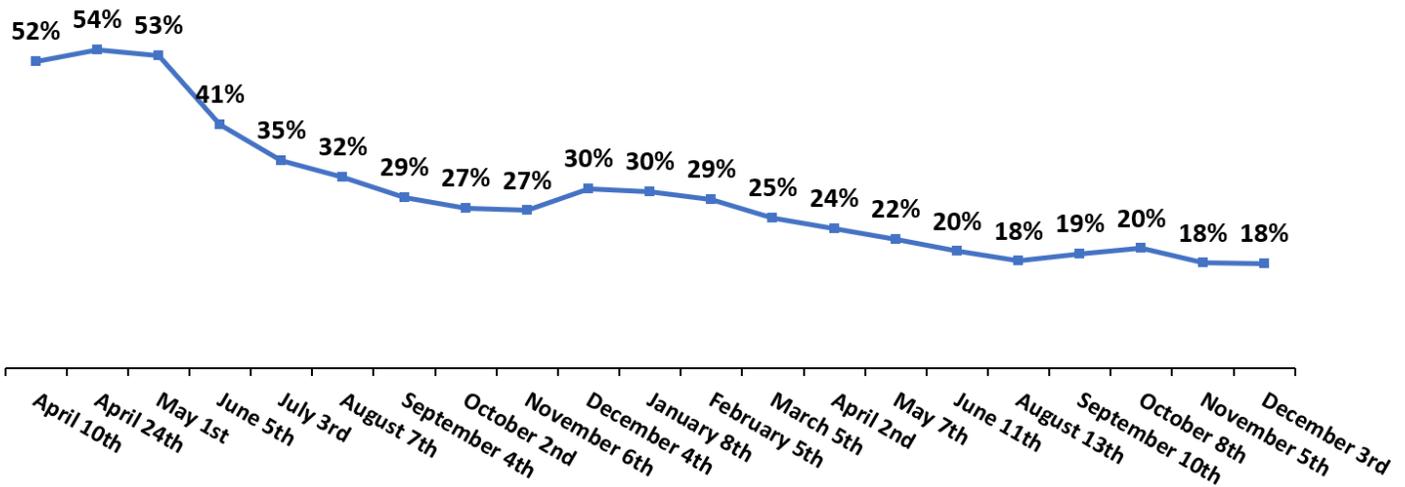
Figure 3. COVID-19 Impact on Community Health Center Weekly Visits, April 2020-September 2021



Notes: Weekly visit losses compared to average pre-COVID-19 weekly visits, and include "all visits regardless of service type (e.g., medical, dental, behavioral health, etc.), including virtual visits." Beginning with the July 16, 2021 survey, each survey covers a 2-week period rather than a weekly period. Source: Bureau of Primary Health Care. Health Center COVID-19 Survey. HRSA.

¹ The survey question on changes in visit volume asked health centers to "consider all visits regardless of service type (e.g., medical, dental, behavioral health, etc.), including virtual visits."

Figure 4. Average Percentage of Community Health Center Visits Conducted Virtually, April 2020-December 2021



Note: Virtual visits include all telehealth/telephonic visits of any service type (e.g., medical, dental, behavioral health, etc.). HRSA began reporting the average percentage of health center visits conducted virtually for the second week of the survey (April 10, 2020). Beginning with the July 16, 2021 survey, each survey covers a 2-week period rather than a weekly period. Source: Bureau of Primary Health Care. Health Center COVID-19 Survey. HRSA.

17 million COVID-19 vaccine doses have been received by health center patients

In January 2021, HRSA added questions to the survey to track the number of staff members and patients who received COVID-19 vaccine doses, including the number of patients and staff members who initiated their vaccine series in any setting (received their first dose of a two-dose vaccine [at the health center or elsewhere](#)), those who completed it (received their second dose of a two-dose vaccine or one dose of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine), and, starting in September 2021, the number of patients who received additional vaccine (or booster) doses.

Figure 5 shows the weekly (or bi-weekly) number of health center patients and staff members who initiated and completed their COVID-19 vaccine series at approximately monthly intervals from January to December 2021. The number of patients initiating their vaccine series peaked at more than 551,000 the week of April 9th, around the time when [all U.S. adults became eligible for COVID-19 vaccination](#).

HRSA stopped reporting the number of staff member vaccinations after May 2021, but by that time a cumulative total of more than 238,000 had initiated and 233,000 had completed their vaccine series (**Figure 6**). In total, community health centers have reported nearly 8.2 million patients who initiated vaccination and more than 7.7 million who completed their vaccine series from January to December 2021, and nearly 1.06 million patients who received additional vaccine doses from September to December 2021. [HRSA reports](#) that of the nearly 16.98 million vaccine doses received by health center patients, two-thirds (67 percent) were administered to racial/ethnic minority patients.

Figure 5. Community Health Center Staff Members and Patients Who Initiated and Completed COVID-19 Immunization, and Patients Who Received Additional COVID-19 Vaccine Doses, January 8-December 3, 2021

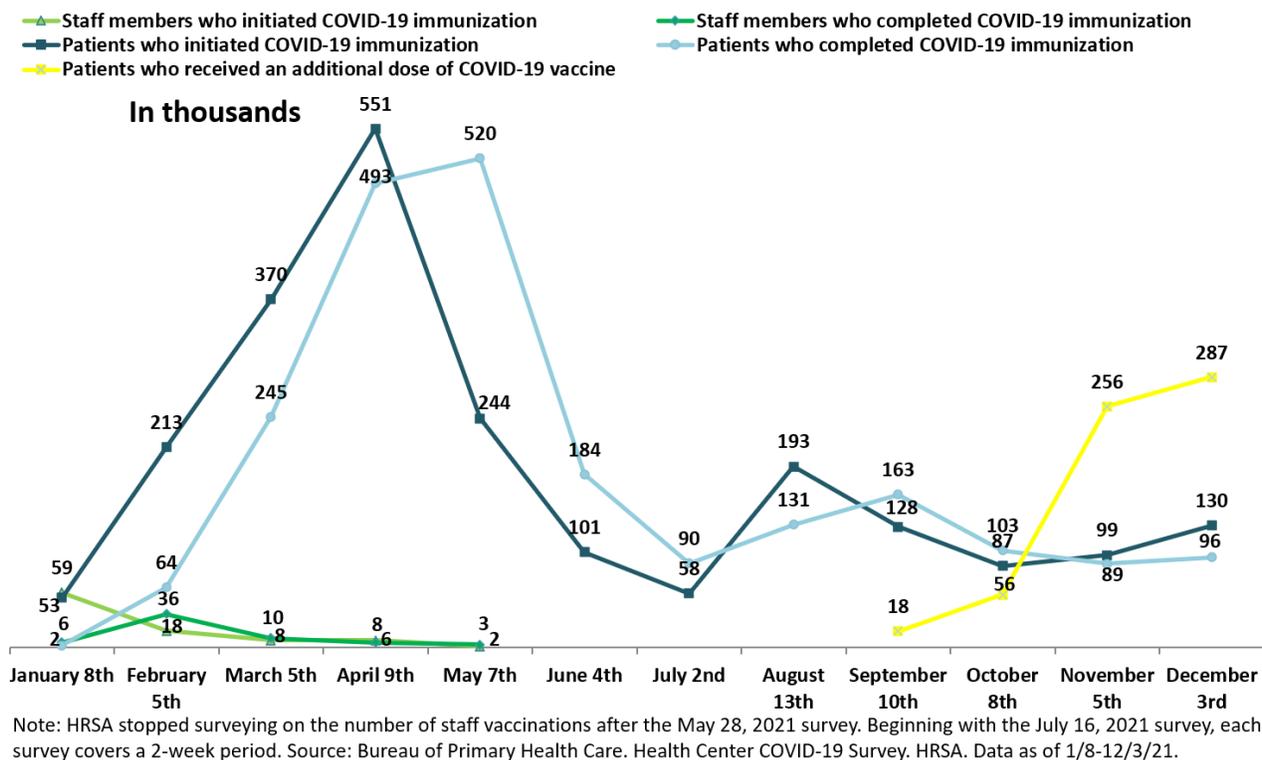
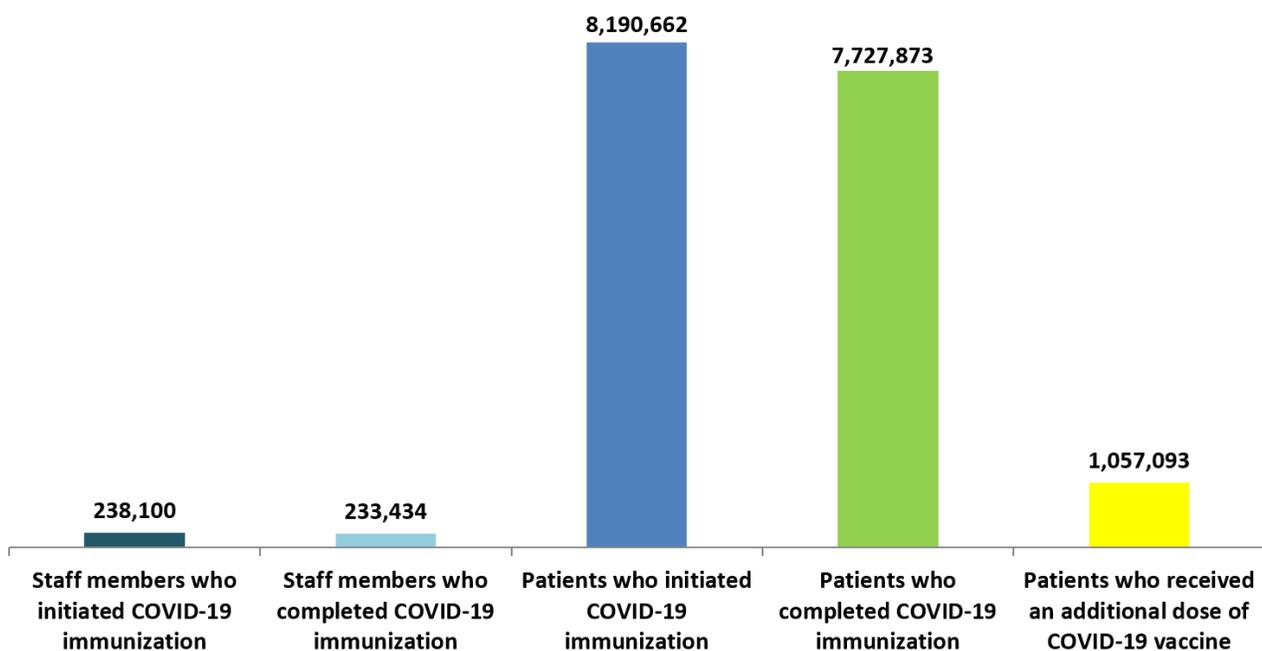


Figure 6. Community Health Center Staff Members and Patients Who Initiated and Completed COVID-19 Immunization, and Patients Who Received Additional COVID-19 Vaccine Doses, January 8-December 3, 2021



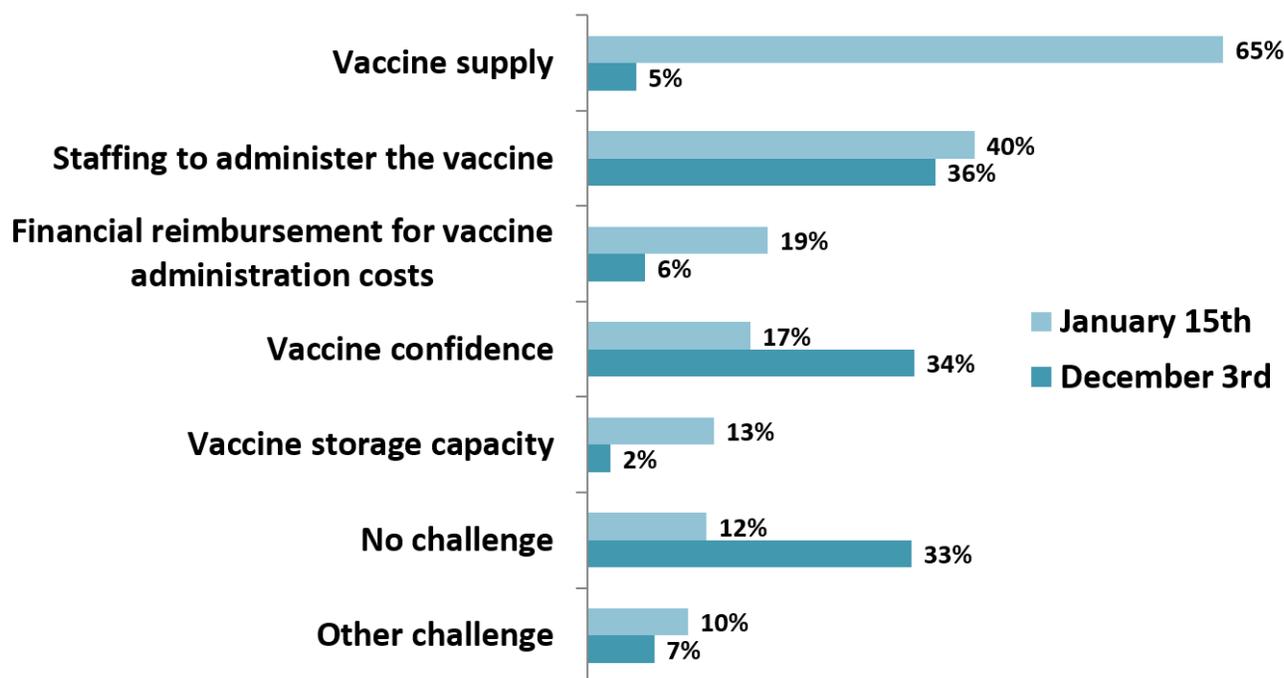
Note: The survey stopped reporting on staff vaccinations after the May 28, 2021 survey and began asking about patients who received additional COVID-19 vaccine doses for the two-week survey period ending September 10th, 2021. Source: Bureau of Primary Health Care. Health Center COVID-19 Survey. HRSA. Data as of January 8-December 3, 2021.

In February 2021, community health centers participating in the [Health Center COVID-19 Vaccine Program](#) began receiving direct supplies of COVID-19 vaccines in addition to vaccines they were receiving from their state or jurisdiction. [HRSA further reports](#) that among the more than 7.5 million doses administered from the Health Center COVID-19 Vaccine Program, three-quarters (75 percent) were received by racial/ethnic minority patients. The 7.5 million Vaccine Program doses account for 44 percent of the nearly 17 million patient vaccine doses reported. HRSA began reporting the share of vaccine doses from the program in October 2021; this figure ranged from a high of 29 percent as of October 22nd to a low of roughly a quarter of doses (23 percent) as of December 3rd.

With the initiation of the Health Center COVID-19 Vaccine Program and the rapid expansion of vaccine supplies generally, the share of community health centers reporting vaccine supply as a challenge to deploying COVID-19 vaccines fell from [nearly two-thirds as of January 2021](#) to five percent as of December 2021 (**Figure 7**). Over that time period, the share of health centers reporting vaccine confidence as a challenge doubled, from 17 percent to 34 percent, while staffing to administer the vaccine remains challenging. Still, while only one in eight health centers reported no challenges in January, this share has increased to one in three as of December 2021.

Reporting on health centers' use of mobile vans and pop-up vaccination clinics began the week of April 9th, 2021. That week, eight percent of health centers reported using mobile vans and 26 percent reported using pop-up clinics to administer vaccines. Although the measure was modified so that trend comparisons are not possible, as of the most recent (December 3rd) reporting period, 38 percent of health centers reported hosting mobile vans, pop-up, and/or school-based vaccination clinics.

Figure 7. Challenges Reported by Community Health Centers in Deploying COVID-19 Vaccines, as of January 15th and December 3rd, 2021



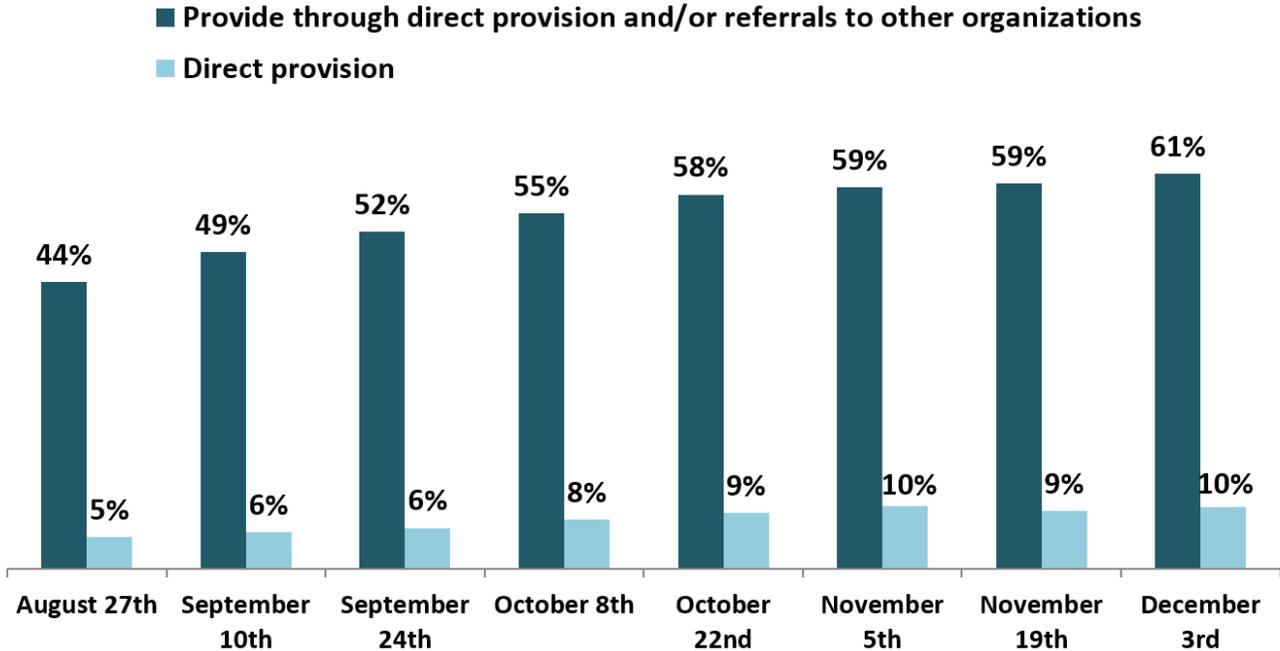
Note: Responding community health centers were instructed to “select all answers that apply from the list.”

Source: Bureau of Primary Health Care. Health Center COVID-19 Survey. HRSA. Data as of January 15th and December 3rd 2021.

Most community health centers provide access to antibody therapies

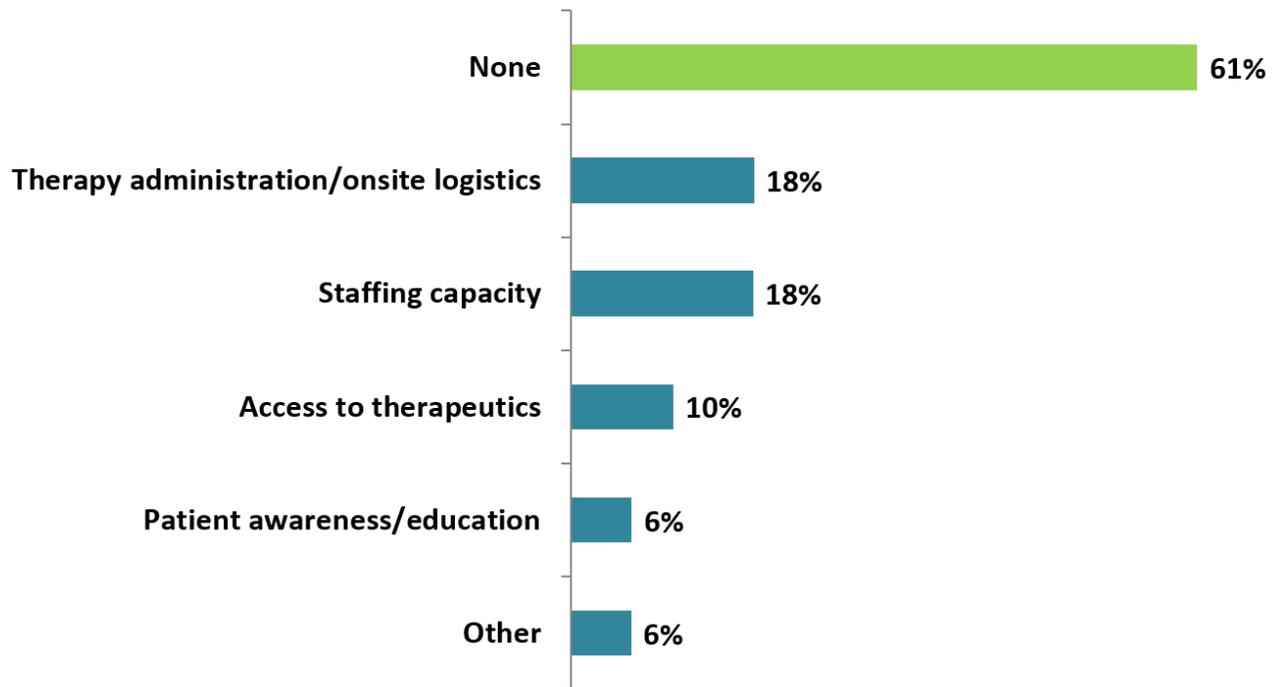
In August 2021, HRSA began reporting on health centers' provision of monoclonal antibody therapy for patients with COVID-19. As **Figure 8** shows, the share of responding health centers that report providing access to monoclonal antibody therapies, whether through direct provision and/or referrals to another organization, grew from 44 percent in August to 61 percent in December. Over that same time period, the share of responding health centers that reported directly providing monoclonal antibody therapy rose from five to ten percent. With the September 24th report, HRSA began reporting the number of monoclonal antibody doses administered by health centers. From that date to December 3rd, health centers administered a cumulative total of 12,117 doses. The survey asks health center respondents that do not provide access to monoclonal antibody therapy to report barriers or challenges to doing so. As **Figure 9** shows, more than six in ten (61 percent) health centers that do not provide this therapy report no challenges, while 18 percent each cite staffing capacity and therapy administration or on-site logistics as barriers to providing access to monoclonal antibody therapy.

Figure 8. Percent of Health Centers Providing Access to Monoclonal Antibody Therapy, August-December 2021



Notes: Health centers are considered as providing access to monoclonal antibody therapy through direct provision and/or referrals to another organization that provides monoclonal antibody therapies. HRSA did not report this percentage until the September 24th report, so the percentages for August 27th and September 10th were calculated by taking the converse of the percentage of health centers that reported not providing access to monoclonal antibody therapy. Source: Bureau of Primary Health Care. Health Center COVID-19 Survey. HRSA. Data as of August 27-December 3, 2021.

Figure 9. Challenges Reported by Community Health Centers in Providing Access to Monoclonal Antibody Therapy, as of December 3rd, 2021



Note: This question is asked only of health centers that did not report directly providing or referring for monoclonal antibody therapies. Community health centers were instructed to “select all answers that apply from the list.”
Source: Bureau of Primary Health Care. Health Center COVID-19 Survey. HRSA. Data as of December 3rd, 2021.

Conclusion

An analysis of 20 months of Health Center COVID-19 Survey data reported by HRSA reveals the successes achieved and challenges faced by community health centers in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, health centers have reported:

- testing more than 15 million patients for the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) from April 2020 to December 2021, with an improvement in average turn-around times for test results.
- returning to near-normalcy as the share of staff members unable to work, declines in visits, and the number of temporarily closed health center sites improved over time and as the share of health center visits conducted virtually decreased from more than half of visits, on average, in April 2020 to 18 percent as of December 2021.
- successfully launching COVID-19 vaccine campaigns, administering nearly 17 million patient vaccine doses from January 2021 to the most current reporting period, two-thirds of them to racial/ethnic minority patients.

The Health Center COVID-19 Vaccine Program helped to address vaccine supply challenges such that only five percent of health centers currently report vaccine supply as a challenge to deploying COVID-19 vaccines. Still, the challenge of vaccine confidence has grown in importance, while staffing capacity to administer vaccines has remained a consistent challenge from the start of the COVID-19 vaccination effort.

Over the past few months, the share of health centers providing access to monoclonal antibody therapy has grown

to more than six in ten as of the most recent reporting period, but only ten percent of health centers directly provide this therapy. The findings from 20 months of survey data demonstrate the success of community health centers in testing for, deploying vaccines against, and providing access to treatment for COVID-19 and their importance in ensuring equitable access to these measures for medically underserved populations and communities. Community health centers will continue to play a key role in the [federal response to the COVID-19 pandemic](#), as they will begin family vaccination clinics and will distribute free at-home testing kits. Still, challenges remain on the horizon as the nation continues to address the delta variant as the effects of the emerging omicron variant remain to be seen, and as a winter surge in cases is expected.

Appendix

Since its initiation, the survey has queried on a number of measures including health centers' COVID-19 diagnostic testing capacity and average test turn-around times, the number and race/ethnicity of patients tested for the COVID-19 virus, the number of staff members and patients who tested positive, the availability of personal protective equipment, and the effect of the pandemic on health centers' operational capacity.

While a number of early measures were dropped over the 20 months that the survey has been fielded to health centers, HRSA has also added additional survey questions to reflect the changing nature of the pandemic and the availability of COVID-19 vaccines and new therapies. In January 2021, the survey added questions on the receipt of COVID-19 vaccine doses by health center staff members and patients and the race/ethnicity of patient vaccine recipients. HRSA also has reported the number and share of vaccine doses administered from the [Health Center COVID-19 Vaccine Program](#), challenges health centers face in deploying COVID-19 vaccines, and data on COVID-19 vaccine pop-up clinics. Data on monoclonal antibody therapy started being reported in late August 2021.

Where measures do not correspond to the full 20 months of data, this is indicated in the note and corresponding figures. It should be noted that the survey response rate varied with each survey period, ranging from 56 percent to 82 percent, but has generally exceeded 70 percent, particularly in 2021 since health centers that participate in the Health Center COVID-19 Vaccine Program are [required to respond](#) to the survey.