The Negative Impact of Defunding of Centers of Excellence and Health Careers Opportunity Programs on Our Nation’s Health Care Workforce

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Racial and ethnic minorities comprise over a quarter of the total population of the United States, yet only roughly 6% of practicing physicians are Latino, African-American or Native American. As racial and ethnic minority populations increase, a corresponding need exists for increased numbers of minority physicians.

The Centers of Excellence (COE) and the Health Careers Opportunity Program (HCOP) seek to increase health professions educational opportunities for educationally and/or economically disadvantaged students and underrepresented minorities in the health professions. Institutions that receive funding for diversity programs recruit and graduate up to five times the number of disadvantaged and underrepresented minority health professionals as other institutions. Seventy percent of participants in HCOP are accepted into health professional schools and such students are up to ten times more likely to practice in medically underserved areas when they finish their training. This evidence shows that these are effective programs that are accomplishing their stated goals.

The defunding of COE and HCOP would have a negative impact on our nation’s health care workforce. As of July 2012, half the babies born in the United States are racial minorities. Young people in minority racial/ethnic groups are the future workforce in health care and other economic sectors. Both COE and HCOP are important components in helping achieve the increased diversity of our nation’s health professionals.