

Health Center Boards and Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) By: Emily Heard, Director, Health Center Governance Training, NACHC

Around the country, health center staff continue to prepare for and execute an organized response to the outbreak of the novel coronavirus (also known as COVID-19). At the same time, health center boards are exercising their governance duties during this time by, among other things:

- **Ensuring there are plans in place** – Health center boards provide oversight by ensuring the CEO and their staff have [Emergency Preparedness](#) and [Contingency Plans](#) in place as they continue to care for patients in their communities and respond to COVID-19. Ideally, boards are reviewing these plans and approving those that may require board approval. Boards are asking questions such as:
 - Do we have Emergency Preparedness and Contingency Plans in place?
 - Have our plans been updated to respond to COVID-19?
 - What is our communication strategy to the communities we serve?
- **Considering resource needs and long-term strategic implications** – Boards are considering budgetary implications of responding to COVID-19 and the longer-term strategic implications for their center. They are also supporting CEOs in ensuring the health center’s own workforce is supported at this time. Boards are asking questions such as:
 - Does the health center have the resources we need to execute the plans?
 - Are additional resources needed to support the health center’s own workforce?
 - What are the likely impacts on the center’s finances?
 - How may the health center’s priorities need to be adjusted to respond to the immediate need?
 - How frequently should we be updating plans and considering risk?
- **Ensuring they can stay connected and continue to meet monthly** – Per the requirements in the Health Resources and Services Administration’s Health Center Program Compliance Manual ([Chapter 19: Board Authority](#)), health center boards must meet monthly. Boards are taking measures to ensure they can meet virtually where permitted by state and local laws in the event of future quarantine or isolation, and in the context of restrictions on gatherings. Tips on virtual meeting participation can be found in NACHC’s [Governance Guide for Health Center Boards](#), Chapter 9: Effective Board Functioning and from [BoardSource](#).

Board members also **continue to serve as community ambassadors**. Given the widespread impact of COVID-19, board members may receive outreach from members of the community, media, and other stakeholders. Board members are:

- Providing feedback to the center about concerns in their community;
- Providing credible information to community members, such as resources from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>); and
- Following the policy at their center for media inquires, which often calls for questions to be referred to a designated staff person.

Questions?

- If you have questions about COVID-19, please visit <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/> or <http://www.nachc.org/coronavirus/>, or contact preparedness@nachc.org.
- If you have a general health center governance question, please contact Emily Heard, Director of Health Center Governance at trainings@nachc.org.

Note: This was originally authored for the NACHC blog week of March 16th, 2020.