Communities rely on nonprofits, nonprofits rely on accurate census
By David L. Thompson

A full and accurate count of all residents is critical to our democracy, to the wellbeing of our communities and, indeed, to the survival of charitable organizations and missions of charitable nonprofits. This is an article intended to give proof to that last assertion — that the Census is essential to charitable organizations — but first the news, both good and bad.

The good news is that Congress came through with significant funding so the Census Bureau can proceed with the planning for the constitutionally mandated decennial count of every man, woman and child in the country. After years of short-changing the Census Bureau, Congress appropriated $3.1 billion for the 2020 Census — the largest single sum for the Bureau in a single year.

Community groups are important partners in promoting an accurate census. They have knitted together very fragile networks of care, disruptions in these networks can have direct consequences for patients. The Census is a key to keeping these networks intact.

The bad news suggests that no degree of planning and spending will correct for changes that are guaranteed to create an incomplete and inaccurate count. On March 26, the Commerce Secretary announced the Census Bureau’s efforts to ensure an accurate count. The Commerce Secretary told the media that they would be looking to a variety of community groups for help.

The Census Bureau was already in a position in which they might have been able to create coordinated networks of care and, as a key part of the ACOs, to coordinate services and supports for those with the most complex needs, those who are homeless, have a mental health diagnosis or a combination of needs, were not able to be reached in the first 90 days of enrollment. It will be important that those in similar situations with ACOs in 2018 have flexibility to switch plans if necessary to ensure quality services and care.

In light of recent challenges, nonprofit organizations have a significant role to play in ensuring that people understand the importance of being counted and of seeing the Census as an opportunity to engage and help ensure a fair and accurate count, particularly in hard-to-count areas.

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