January is more than just the start of the New Year. It’s also National Blood Donor Month, an opportunity to recognize those across the country who regularly roll up their sleeves and help save lives. Without the generosity of those who give so selflessly, millions of patients each year would not have the blood they require for emergency needs or ongoing treatments.

Blood is unique in our healthcare ecosystem. It cannot be synthetically made, meaning volunteers are the only way to provide blood to those in need. And the demand is great: every two seconds, someone in America needs a blood transfusion.

One in seven patients entering a hospital require blood to be available. This ranges from trauma victims to patients battling sickle cell disease or Thalassemia, or ensure a successful organ or bone marrow transplant. Cancer patients use 25 percent of all blood donations and blood transfusions are needed in one out of every 83 newborn deliveries in America today, a rate that has increased by more than 50 percent between 2006 and 2015. The list goes on.

In short, all of us are likely to know someone who will need blood. Despite this, only three percent of all Americans donate blood. That reality should trouble all of us.

Older Americans are among the most frequent donors. The rate of donations from those 65 and older increased by 15 percent between 2017 and 2019, a figure that should make us all proud. However, during that same time period, the percentage of younger donors who donated blood – those between the ages of 16 and 24 years old – decreased by double digits.

That trajectory is unsustainable. The answer, however, is looking many of us in the mirror: every eligible donor has the ability to create a more reliable and available blood supply for our community. Donating blood takes as little as 10 minutes and, all told, you’ll be in and out of the blood center in as little time as it takes you to watch an episode of your favorite television show.

Donating isn’t just easy, it’s also safe and can be done every 56 days – giving all of us a lot of opportunities to do a lot of good each year. It’s critical that donors seize these chances to make giving blood a routine way of giving back.

We’ve all seen the images of people lining up at blood centers following an emergency, for which we are all grateful. However, many don’t realize that it’s the blood already on the shelf at the time of an event that helps those in immediate need. A donation can take anywhere from 12 to 48 hours to become available for patients in need since all donated blood is run through more than a dozen tests to make sure it is safe for transfusion. That’s why the best way to help after the next emergency is to give generously right now.

Roughly 7 million blood donors walk through blood center doors annually. We all owe a debt of gratitude for their dedication to helping save lives. That’s what this month is all about. As we make our resolutions for the new year, I encourage all those who can to make blood donation a priority. Together, we can help save lives and support more people across our community.