



NATIONAL
Dental Student
LOBBY DAY

National Health Service Corps Funding

Background

NHSC: The National Health Service Corps is a program that utilizes scholarships and loan repayment to recruit health care professionals to work in underserved areas. The program was originally enacted in 1970 to respond to the geographic dispersal of health service providers, which left some areas with low access to health care services. These areas are called health professional shortage areas (HPSA). In order to be designated as a HPSA, a geographic location must be rational for the delivery of health services, a specified ratio of population-to-practitioner must be exceeded, and resources in the area must be shown to be over utilized, excessively distant, or inaccessible. The NHSC places doctors, dentists, nurse-practitioners, certified nurse-midwives, physician assistants and other clinicians in HPSAs.

Dental HPSAs: A Dental HPSAs is a geographic area that has low access to dental care. Areas are designated as Dental HPSAs when the ratio of population to dentist is 5,000 to 1 or when the ratio is between 4,000 to 1 and 5,000 to 1 and the area has unusually high needs for dental services or insufficient capacity of existing dental providers. Additionally, dental providers in the area are over utilized, excessively distant, or inaccessible.

As of September 2008, the Health Services and Resources Administration (HRSA) stated that there were 4,048 Dental HPSAs, and about 48 million people living in those areas. HRSA estimates that 9,432 practitioners are needed as dental providers. At that number of providers, the population to practitioner ratio would be 3,000 to 1.

Student Debt: In 2007, 91% of dental students graduated with an average debt load of about \$157,000. The amount of debt plays a role in the decisions that students make on where to set up a practice and work. Highly populated, affluent areas offer the best options for new dentists.

The NHSC's loan repayment program offers to pay up to \$50,000 for two years of service in an area that needs service providers. There is also a possibility of extending the placement. The scholarship program pays the tuition and fees of participants, and in return, the students agree to provide one year of service in the Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA) of greatest need, to which they are assigned for each school year or partial school year of scholarship support received. There is a minimum of a 2-year service commitment and a maximum of a 4-year commitment. Currently, the NHSC can only fund about 1 in 2 loan repayment requests and only 1 in 7 to 11 applicants for scholarships¹.

¹ Washington Post: "Community Health Clinics Flourish, but Doctors Are Few; Government Needs to Entice Physicians, Health Officials Say" 6/19/2007.

NHSC Sites: The NHSC place service providers in these areas, so clinicians practice where there is the most need. These areas are inner cities, farm towns, migrant communities, and other rural and frontier areas. NHSC sites care for everyone in the community regardless of ability to pay. Communities request the service providers that they need, and NHSC sites function as part of a system that includes hospitals and specialty care.

Funding: Funding is for both field (administration) and recruitment (scholarship and loan repayment awards).

In the past 5 years, funding for the NHSC has been cut by \$47 million, over 27 percent of a budget that was already insufficient in FY 2003. We strongly urge a steady and sustainable increase starting with a \$235 million appropriation for the NHSC in FY 2010.

Washington Staff Contacts:

Jennifer Fisher, American Dental Association, 202.789.5160, fisherj@ADA.org

Deborah Darcy, American Dental Education Association, 202.289.7201, darcy@ADEA.org