

Washington Health Corps Expands Primary Care in Rural Communities

In 1991, the Legislature created the Health Professional Loan Repayment and Conditional Scholarship program, now known as the State Health Program (SHP), to address health professional shortages in rural and underserved urban communities. The program provides financial support to eligible licensed health professionals through loan repayment. **Washington Health Corps** was established by the 2019 Legislature as an umbrella under which the current SHP exists and new Behavioral Health Program (BHP) will exist. WSAC also administers the Federal Health Program (FHP), which is a federal grant-state match program, under Washington Health Corps.



“The loan repayment program made it feasible to move to **this area** where the rate of pay is less than the urban/suburban areas. I had to take a significant pay cut to accept this job. It has all been worth it though, as I do love the Methow Valley and the population we serve.”

— Physician's Assistant
Methow, WA

Benefits to the State



Washington Health Corps reduces barriers to access primary care health services in the state's rural and underserved urban communities.



Benefits to Students

Washington Health Corps benefits students and health care professionals by reducing their educational debt and allowing more flexibility in where they serve.

Emerging Issues Present Challenges to the Health Care Field in Washington State

- Washington's rural communities have a variety of barriers to access primary health care. A notable portion (24 percent) of Washington's population is rural. Thirty-eight percent of the people who live in rural Washington are at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level, and 15 percent of the rural population are elderly, according to an estimate by the U.S. Census Bureau.
- Washington State is facing an aging medical workforce. According to a recent study conducted by the University of Washington Center for Health Workforce Studies, 70 percent of physicians in Washington are 56 years old or older.
- The state is facing a primary health care provider shortage. This program provides incentives for medical students in Washington to practice primary care medicine instead of specialty medicine.

Program Results

The program has placed more than 1,000 primary care health care providers in 38 counties across the state. This number includes over 340 participants who have benefited from the Federal Health Program and who are serving in federally designated Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs).

More than 360 students in health professional training programs have received scholarships. The majority of these participants have attended postsecondary institutions in Washington, and all participants must practice as medical professionals in the state of Washington.

“ Though I really enjoy my work setting and my clientele, I can admit that the loan repayment program opened my eyes to this site. I think once you can draw clinicians to the sites, it allows them to see the need and the rewarding nature of the work, and **makes them want to stay.** ”

— Pharmacist
Yakima, WA

State and Federal Program Requirements Differ

Federal Health Program (FHP)	2 years min. work in shortage area	Must work full-time	Must work in federally designated HPSA (Health Professional Shortage Area)
State Health Program (SHP) & Behavioral Health Program (BHP)	3 years min. work in shortage area	May work less than full-time	No HPSA requirement

“ Thank you for your help in this endeavor. I cannot tell you how challenging it is to recruit good physicians to rural areas. It is so good to have this program available that actually **rewards physicians for making a commitment to our rural population.** ”

— Rural Health Facility
Walla Walla, WA



For More Information

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Washington's student financial aid programs are known collectively as Opportunity Pathways.

The Washington Student Achievement Council administers these programs, helping tens of thousands of students earn college certificates and degrees annually.

More information about Washington Health Corps can be found at wsac.wa.gov/health.

