

Expansion of National Health Service Corps Loan Repayment Program

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) could double the number of clinicians in the NHSC loan repayment program and add 1,200 more mental health professionals to underserved areas over the next two years. Starting June 1, Applications will be accepted on an open, continuous basis until all Recovery Act funds are expended — 15 months or sooner. Members are strongly encouraged to begin the application process early, especially if your agency will need to recruit new clinicians or obtain approval for new NHSC sites located within a Health Professional Shortage Area.

BACKGROUND

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) provides almost \$200 million for the National Health Service Corps (NHSC) loan repayment program (LRP). ARRA funds could support up to 4,000 new NHSC clinicians to work with underserved populations. Currently, mental health professionals comprise a third of the NHSC workforce.

ARRA also allocated \$24 million for new NHSC Scholarships and \$20 million for state loan repayment programs to be allocated by states. Eligibility requirements and benefits vary from state to state.

\$75 million is reserved for renewals in 2011. After the initial 2 year service requirement, LRP clinicians with remaining education loan debt can apply for renewals until the loans are paid off. Note that in order to qualify for a renewal, clinicians will need to receive an award by September 30, 2009 in order to serve the 2 years required before applying for a renewal.

EXPANDED, BUT TIME LIMITED OPPORTUNITY

HRSA must spend these funds within 18 months. Applications will be opened June 1, 2009 and awards will be made on a rolling basis throughout the year. For the first time, clinicians do not need to be employed at the site at the time of application. Most applications will be processed within 8 weeks of receipt of a complete application.

NHSC is also recruiting new sites. With these new funds, HRSA will likely accept much lower Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA) scores than in previous years. In 2008, HPSA scores as low as 8 (out of a possible 26 points) were funded, and HRSA may fund lower HPSA scores this year.

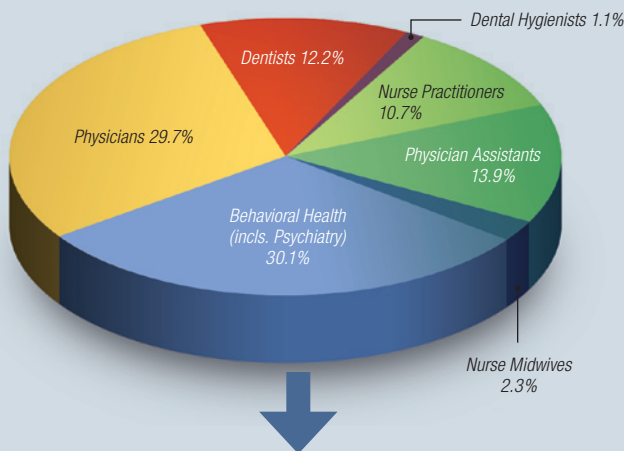
In addition, limits on the number of health professionals per site will be significantly raised to allow many more clinicians to serve within the same site. Currently, sites are limited to no more than 2 allopathic (MD) or osteopathic (DO) physicians, and no more than a combined total of 2 Nurse Practitioners, Physician Assistants, or Certified Nurse Midwives. Mental health clinicians are limited to no more than 2 Psychiatrists (MD or DO), and no more than a combined total of 2 Clinical or Counseling Psychologists, Licensed Clinical Social Workers, Licensed Professional Counselors, Marriage and Family Therapists, or Psychiatric Nurse Specialists. See the NHSC site for more information on eligibility.

RESOURCES AND LINKS

The National Council website has resources and presentations on the NHSC, including links to the application requirements and a checklist for applying, NHSC job opportunities, and state level data on HPSA designated areas, State Loan Repayment programs, and number of NHSC clinicians per area.

Distribution of Health Professions in NHSC

Source: 2007 NHSC Field Strength



Distribution of Behavioral Health Professions in NHSC

