



## Closing Critical Gaps in Health Care Workforce: Providing Services to Utah Rural and Underserved Populations

### *Utah Health Care Workforce Financial Assistance Program Act*

#### Summary

The Utah Health Care Workforce Financial Assistance Program (HCWFAP) was enacted under UCA, 26-46, and provides educational loan repayment to health care professionals who agree to provide health care services to Utah rural and medically underserved populations. This program strengthens the health care workforce in rural and underserved areas, and also makes it possible for under-represented groups to join the health care workforce. This helps to ensure delivery of culturally effective and language appropriate health care.

#### Key Facts

##### Building on Success

Since 1990 the HCWFAP has assisted in the placement of 347 health care professionals (7 dentists, 25 mental health therapists, 197 nurses, 93 physicians, and 25 physician assistants in rural and underserved areas. Twenty-five (25) of Utah's 29 counties have had health care professionals provide services to their medically underserved populations.

##### Rural Health Impacts

These health care professionals served their two-year service commitments in 22 rural and 3 urban counties. Rural communities have a difficult time attracting and retaining qualified health care professionals. Placement sites include: Bear River Valley Hospital, Tremonton; LDS Family Services, Washington County; San Juan Health Services District, Moab; Smithfield Clinic, Cache County; Tricounty Health Department, Duchesne; Valley View Medical Center, Iron County; Wayne Community Health Center, Bicknell; as well as sites in Millard, Sanpete, Sevier, Tooele, and Uintah Counties.

##### Health Care Professional Shortage is Critical

The supply of health care professionals is not keeping up with the demand. In fact, training programs produce about half as many graduates as are needed. The rapid aging of Utah's 'baby boomer' population will further shrink the supply of health care professionals just as the 'baby boomers' will require more health care services in rural and underserved areas (Utah Medical Education Council, 2004). Educational loan repayment opportunities level the playing field for rural communities to recruit health care professionals.

#### Frequently Asked Questions

##### What is the purpose of the Utah Health Care Workforce Financial Assistance Program?

This HCWFAP assists in the recruitment and retention of health care professionals dedicated to serving communities that lack adequate access to primary health care. Grant recipients must complete a minimum 2 year service obligation in a medically underserved area.

##### Is the Program Effective? To what extent is it able to retain grant recipients in service to underserved areas?

Yes, the program is fulfilling its purpose: to support a reliable primary care safety net in Utah.

- 66.7% of the nurses have been retained in the state of Utah.
- 91.3% of the physicians continue to practice in Utah.
- 90.9% of physician assistants have stayed in Utah. (Utah Department of Health, 2005)

##### What does the appropriation buy?

The annual appropriation amount funds approximately 40-45 Workforce Financial Assistance grants to health care professionals to serve a 2 year service obligation. The Utah Medical Education Council has identified a critical shortage of health care professionals in rural and underserved areas of the State.

##### How does this program target groups that are under represented in the health care workforce?

Most of Utah's health care professional training programs, including the Colleges of Nursing and the School of Medicine, engage in outreach and professional recruitment efforts. Promotion and placement of health care professionals is also facilitated through the National Health Service Corps.

Revised: April 12, 2006.

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