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## **State awards loan repayment grants to build health care workforce**

*More than \$700,000 helps health care professionals in areas with limited access to care*

(Anchorage, AK) — Alaska awarded its first grants through its student loan repayment program, SHARP (Supporting Health care Access through loan Re-Payment). The Alaska Department of Health and Social Services program helps recruit and retain health care providers in areas of Alaska that have a provider shortage.

The 14 awards, totaling \$731,771, were awarded as follows: \$230,000 to five behavioral health providers, \$140,000 to two dental care providers, and \$361,771 to seven medical providers. The providers are based in Anchorage, Bethel, Dillingham, Kenai, Homer, Petersburg, Talkeetna, Tok and Wrangell.

“The overall number of care providers in Alaska is slowly growing, but many Alaskans are still not getting the care they need,” Health and Social Services Commissioner Bill Hogan said. “By joining other states that offer providers this effective incentive, we are helping Alaskans who face financial, cultural or geographic barriers to care.”

Alaska has 2.06 physicians per 1,000 residents, well below the national average of 2.38 per 1,000.

Practitioners can earn up to \$35,000 per year toward their student loans by meeting several criteria. They must work full-time for at least two years for an organization federally recognized as serving an area or population with a health care shortage. There are stiff penalties for not fulfilling the required commitment.

This round of grants was jointly funded through a \$600,000 one-year grant from the federal Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) and an equal state match funded by the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority and other sources.

HRSA started its federal-state loan repayment program in 1987, and gave 24 other states \$7 million in grants in 2008. The program has helped participating states recruit and retain nearly 3,500 clinicians nationwide so far.

For more details on SHARP, visit <http://hss.state.ak.us/dhCS/healthplanning/sharp/default.htm>

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