

Project Abstract

Project Title: Alaska State Loan Repayment Program
Applicant Name: Alaska Department of Health and Social Services
Address: PO Box, 110610, 350 Main St., Juneau AK 99811-0610
Contact Numbers: (907) 465-4065 (voice); (907) 465-6861 (fax)
E-Mail Address: robert.sewell@alaska.gov
Web Site Address: www.hss.state.ak.us/dph/healthplanning/primarycare/PC_home.htm

Projected number of providers to be recruited, by type for year 1, FFY2010 (one-year grant period, 2-year contracts): 23 total (17 rural, 6 urban) targeting 8 primary care (MD/DO, NP, PA or CNM); 6 dental; 9 behavioral health workers (MD, CP, CSW, PNS, MHC, LPC or MFT).

Purpose: The Alaska Department of Health and Social Services is applying for federal funding to establish a new State Loan Repayment Program for Alaska (ASLRP) to increase retention and recruitment of selected health care practitioners for our state, to improve access to care for underserved and vulnerable populations. Provider organizations (community health centers, mental health programs, tribal health corporations, and critical access hospitals) and state governmental entities such as the Department of Health and Social Services, Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority (AMHTA) and the University of Alaska (UA) have acknowledged and documented the need to increase the number and improve the distribution of primary care practitioners, dentists, and behavioral health workers. They have agreed that a joint state-federal program with at least 50% state and local match will provide a critical supplement to federally funded loan repayment programs. Over time, the national programs have contributed greatly to Alaska's supply of practitioners. The proposed new SLRP program is designed to help stem losses of practitioners to states that offer incentives. Alaska's designated Health Professional Shortage Areas cover many potential employers (including tribally managed programs) in primary care, dental and mental health.

Need: Alaska Physician Supply Task Force Report (2006) and two Status of Recruitment Resources and Strategies (SORRAS) reports (2004, 2006) have documented shortages (e.g., over 200 physicians), high vacancy rates (14%), high recruitment costs, longer time to fill vacancies (especially for rural sites), and problems related to state and national shortages. A UA health professions vacancy study (2007) further documented increasing difficulty in filling behavioral health, dental and primary care professional positions.

Program: The proposed program consists of (1) program management including practitioner and site eligibility determination (Alaska Primary Care Office and State Office of Rural Health); (2) guidance and collaboration to be provided by advisory council of the internal and external partners; (3) loan verification (educational programs & lending institutions), provided by the Commission on Postsecondary Education, (4) payment processing and accounting arrangements (DHSS/HCS) consistent with state and federal guidelines, (5) program evaluation, and (6) funding/sustainability plan.

Scope: Documented shortages will be addressed: primary care (physicians and midlevel providers), dentists, hygienists and behavioral health care providers, for targeted 23 qualifying practices (first year) in federally designated HPSAs; two year minimum contracts, for full-time practitioner commitments.

Capacity: APCO and SORH in DHSS, and ACPE all are experienced in the required tasks, and have the organizational support structure and relationships with stakeholders.