



ALASKA PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION

Committed To Advancing Alaska's Public Health Since 1978

ALPHA RESOLUTION 10-2008

Health Care Professions Loan Repayment & Incentive Program for Alaska

Sponsors: Shelley Hughes, Sheila Wright

WHEREAS the Alaska Public Health Association strives toward the goal of a healthy population, it recognizes that a robust health care workforce is necessary to provide adequate health care access for all Alaskans and is a key ingredient in improving the public health of all Alaskans; and

WHEREAS Alaska is competing with other states and nations for the finite pool of available health care professionals; and

WHEREAS Alaska is suffering from labor shortages in most professional health care occupations¹, and these shortages are hitting primary care "safety net" agencies particularly hard; and

WHEREAS most of the State of Alaska has been designated either a Health Professional Shortage Area or a Medically Underserved Area²; and

WHEREAS a common state-level response to these pressures is the use of financial inducements, collectively known as support-for-service programs (SFSPs), and good outcomes have been achieved with these³; and

WHEREAS national studies have determined loan repayment and incentive programs to be two of the most effective of the several SFSP strategies in terms of both recruitment and retention³; and

WHEREAS a key problem is that Alaska does not have a robust SFSP while most other states do, many have several, and further, some of those are growing³; and

WHEREAS most all other states have state-sponsored SFSPs that influence health professionals' geographic and specialty distributions³; and

WHEREAS it is well-established that many health care professionals carry a heavy debt-burden as they come out of training and are attracted to serving in those locations where a share of that burden can be taken away; and

WHEREAS for areas in the state where providers are required to work in professional isolation due to remote settings, direct incentives are needed to attract more experienced health care providers who do not carry debt and are considered desirable placements; and

WHEREAS considerable precedent exists for state-level offices to sponsor and manage financial support and inducement programs to thus encourage the within-state service of health care personnel; and

WHEREAS in 2006, the Alaska Physician Supply Task Force recommends a number of specific strategies and action steps to assuring an adequate supply of physicians to meet Alaska's need, including creation of a SFSP, and the 2007 Alaska Workforce Vacancy Study and the 2005-2006 Status of Recruitment Resources and Strategies (SORRAS II) point to the need for a state loan repayment and incentive program in order for Alaska to compete with the lower 48 to recruit from a limited pool of numerous types of health care providers nationwide; and

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Alaska Public Association supports the creation of a state-sponsored "Health Care Professions Loan Repayment and Incentive Program" and will advocate for the necessary authorizing and fiduciary legislation.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Alaska Public Health Association will promote and advocate for the establishment of the Health Care Professions Loan Repayment & Incentive Program and engage in low and no-cost advocacy efforts for this purpose such as:

- Circulation of advocacy action requests to membership,
- Circulation of advocacy action requests to partners and other individuals,
- Posting of ALPHA resolutions on the Alaska Public Health Association's website,
- Participation in email advocacy campaigns,
- Contact with policy makers via phone, letter, email and/or in-person meetings,
- Public testimony in legislative hearings, town hall meetings, and other public forums,
- Contribution of op-ed articles and/or letters to the editor,
- Contributions to radio programs via calling-in or scheduled interviews, and
- Distribution of this resolution statement to policy makers and key officials.

FISCAL AND PUBLIC HEALTH IMPACT STATEMENT

For Resolution: Health Care Professions Loan Repayment & Incentive Program for Alaska

Fiscal Impact

The fiscal impact on ALPHA by the proposed resolution will be minimal. This action will result in minor costs associated with sending this resolution and accompanying cover letter to policy makers. If implemented as proposed, the fiscal impact of the program to the state's budget is

estimated to be \$7 million and will provide for approximately 80 practitioner participants (10 in each practitioner category).

Public Health Impact

This public health impact by implementation of the proposed resolution will be significant. This action will benefit public health by helping to increase the number of health care professionals who chose to work in Alaska which will increase the number of Alaskans

1. Who will have ready access to health care services
2. Who will receive health care services

This action will also benefit public health by improving overall health outcomes for Alaska's residents.

References:

¹Alaska Health Workforce Vacancy Study Research Summary. University of Alaska. August 2007. http://nursing.uaa.alaska.edu/acrh/index_downloads/workforce-summary_final.pdf.

²US Department of Human Services, Health Resources and Service Administration. Health Professional Shortage Area. <http://hpsafind.hrsa.gov/>.

³Health Care Professions Loan Repayment Program Concept Proposal. Pat Carr, Chief Health Planning & Systems Development, Alaska DHSS. September 11, 2007. <http://www.hss.state.ak.us/primarycare/assets/loan-proposal.pdf>.