

# Program Assistance Letter

**DOCUMENT NUMBER:** 2005-04

**DOCUMENT TITLE:** Benefits of the Automatic Health Professional Shortage Area Designation

**DATE:** March 2, 2005

**TO:** FQHC Look-Alike Executive Directors

**Purpose:** The purpose of this Program Assistance Letter is to notify all Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) Look-Alike organizations of their automatic Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA) designation and some of the benefits of the HPSA designation. All FQHC Look-Alikes are now eligible to receive Recruitment and Retention Assistance available through the National Health Service Corps (NHSC), including those that were previously ineligible due to lack of HPSA status.

**Benefits of the HPSA Designation:** The Health Care Safety Net Amendments of 2002 granted automatic HPSA status to all FQHCs that meet the charging requirements of section 334 of the Public Health Service Act, which includes FQHC Look-Alikes. The HPSA designation confers: (1) basic *eligibility to apply to receive NHSC personnel* (scholars, loan repayors or Ready Responders); and (2) *eligibility to be a site where a J-1 visa physician can serve* [upon recommendation from a state or an interested U.S. government agency such as the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), or Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)]. The HPSA status aids health centers in their efforts to recruit and retain health professionals.

**NHSC Clinical Vacancy List:** For successful recruitment of health professionals, it is important to: develop and maintain an accurate list of current clinical vacancies; and make the list widely available to providers seeking positions at health centers or other facilities serving the underserved. An excellent source for accomplishing these goals is the NHSC Opportunities List (List). It is the NHSC's on-line list of opportunities in HPSAs. All FQHC Look-Alike vacancies are eligible to be included on the List, which is available at <http://nhsc.bhpr.hrsa.gov/jobs/>. NHSC personnel must serve at a vacancy on the List, with the NHSC giving priority to the placement of its personnel in HPSAs of greatest shortage (see "HPSA Score" below). In addition, physicians on J-1 visas often use the List to identify vacancies in HPSAs where they can serve in return for a waiver of their return-home requirement. States participating in the State Loan Repayment Program, and available clinicians with no service obligation who are looking for a job where they can serve the underserved, may also use this List.

**Application Requirement:** An FQHC Look-Alike's vacancies must be on the List before the health center can receive NHSC personnel. The health center must *apply* to the NHSC by completing the NHSC Recruitment and Retention Assistance Application (available at <http://nhsc.bhpr.hrsa.gov/applications/rrea.cfm>). Once you file the NHSC Recruitment and Retention Assistance Application and the NHSC approves the application, your vacancies will be included on the List. Please understand that inclusion of an FQHC Look-Alike vacancy on the List does not assure that the health center will receive NHSC providers or physicians on J-1 visas.

**Site Profile, Website Links:** We strongly recommend that you also fill out the Site Profile form, available at [http://www.mmg-nhsc.com/nhsc/members/communities/site\\_profile.cfm](http://www.mmg-nhsc.com/nhsc/members/communities/site_profile.cfm). This site-specific information can be

linked to your site's name on the List, allowing interested individuals an opportunity to learn more about your site. If your site or organization has an existing website, also provide its URL for additional information.

**HPSA Score:** The NHSC is required to give priority to the placement of its providers in HPSAs of greatest need. A HPSA score, which measures HPSA need, has been automatically computed for every designated FQHC Look-Alike. HPSA scores and a discussion about how they were developed are available at the Shortage Designation website: <http://bhpr.hrsa.gov/shortage/autoscore.htm>. If a FQHC Look-Alike is located in a geographic or population group HPSA, the score for that HPSA can be used instead of the automatic score, and will probably be higher. The NHSC Scholarship, Ready Responder, and DHHS J-1 programs have cut-off scores. Therefore, FQHC Look-Alikes with scores below these cut-offs will not participate in these three programs. For the NHSC Loan Repayment Program, the HPSA score influences the order, in which qualified Applicants are approved to participate in the program. Please be aware that in the past two years the NHSC has had sufficient funding to make awards to all qualified Loan Repayment applicants, regardless of the HPSA score of their site. HPSA scores are not a factor for the "Conrad" State and ARC J-1 programs. If you want to investigate improving your score, please contact your Primary Care Office (PCO). The PCO has the background and expertise in the designation process and will be able to advise you.

**For Further Information:** If you have questions about the NHSC Recruitment and Retention Assistance Application, NHSC Opportunities List, or other related matters, please contact the NHSC Recruitment Training & Support Center at 800-221-9393. If you have any additional questions about the HPSA designation process, please contact the HRSA, Bureau of Health Professions (BPHr), Shortage Designation Branch at 301-594-0816. Facilities are added to the HPSA database on an on-going basis, and will be included in the [HPSA Database Web Look-Up](http://bhpr.hrsa.gov/shortage) found on the BPHr web page: <http://bhpr.hrsa.gov/shortage>. For questions regarding the FQHC Look-Alike Program please contact Bette Darling, FQHC Look-Alike Coordinator, Division of Health Center Development, Bureau of Primary Health Care at 301-594-4342.

/s  
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Bureau of Primary Health Care