



Program Assistance Letter

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DOCUMENT TITLE: Updating National Health Service Corps Vacancy Lists: A Critical Step to Address Health Centers' Workforce Needs

TO: Health Center Program Grantees
Federally Qualified Health Center Look-Alikes
Primary Care Associations
Primary Care Offices
National Cooperative Agreements

I. Purpose

The purpose of this Program Assistance Letter (PAL) is to encourage health centers to update and keep current their vacancy lists and site profiles for the National Health Service Corps (NHSC) program. Health centers that fail to update their vacancy lists reduce their ability to take advantage of the NHSC program, which can help health centers address their workforce needs, thus improving access to care for their patients.

Here and throughout the PAL, "health center" refers to all organizations funded under section 330 of the Public Health Service (PHS) Act, including Community Health Centers, Migrant Health Centers, Health Care for the Homeless health centers, and Public Housing Primary Care health centers and designated Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) Look-Alikes.

II. Background

Recruiting and retaining excellent primary care providers is critical for health centers to meet the Health Center Program mission of improving the health of underserved communities and vulnerable populations by providing comprehensive, culturally competent, quality primary health care services. There are a number of programs and strategies that health centers can use to meet their human resource needs, including participation in the NHSC program.

The NHSC program assists communities located in Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs), as identified by the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, in meeting their primary health care, oral health care, and behavioral health services needs. The NHSC helps place health professionals in HPSAs through financial incentives to future and fully trained health professionals through its scholarship and loan repayment programs in exchange for a minimum of 2 years of service in an approved NHSC site in a HPSA. The NHSC provides

additional support for these clinicians with the goal that these providers will remain in service to the underserved beyond their NHSC commitment. NHSC support also goes out to the communities located within the HPSA, helping the area develop and prepare sites and communities that will attract and retain clinicians and ultimately build better systems of care.

The Health Care Safety Net Amendments of 2002 provided for automatic facility Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA) status for all FQHCs. This qualifies all FQHCs for the NHSC program; however, it is the responsibility of the health center to apply for the program, comply with its requirements, and update its information.

III. Participating in NHSC

The following are factors that a health center may want to explore to ensure that they are fully taking advantage of the NHSC program:

1. **Application:** Health centers must apply to be an NHSC site and participate in the NHSC program through the NHSC Recruitment and Retention (R&R) Assistance application. This application can be submitted at any time, but must be renewed every 3 years.
2. **HPSA Score:** Because they are FQHCs, health centers receive automatic facility HPSA status. Health centers may also be, independent of their FQHC status, located in a HPSA. For example, a health center may also have a HPSA score because of the area where it is located and/or the area's patient population. Because the scores used in the NHSC application determine the health center's eligibility to participate in different types of NHSC programs, health centers should work with their Primary Care Offices (PCOs) to maximize their auto-facility HPSA status and ensure that their HPSA score(s) reflects the need in the community.
3. **NHSC Vacancy Listing:** Health centers submit a vacancy list with their NHSC R&R Assistance application and may update their vacancy list through the NHSC's Recruitment, Training, and Support Center (RTSC) at 1-877-313-1823. The NHSC vacancy list is posted on the NHSC Opportunity List Web site <http://nhscjobs.hrsa.gov> for use not only by NHSC clinician participants, but by any clinician who visits the NHSC site. Health centers can update their vacancy lists at any time. In order to maximize opportunities for recruitment, it is in the best interests of the health center to ensure this vacancy list is accurate and current.
4. **NHSC Site Profile:** It is the responsibility of the organization to submit their site profile. The site profiles give a "snapshot" of the organizations that are participating in the NHSC program. Health centers may update their site profile at any time. As the site profile may be the NHSC Web site visitor's first impression of the health center, health centers are encouraged to ensure that their site profile is an accurate representation of their organization, presented in clear, understandable language. Although the site profiles are not currently available on the NHSC Opportunities List website, this feature is expected to be available within the next few weeks.
5. **Other local/regional/State partners:** There may be many other potential partners to assist health centers with their workforce needs on the local, regional, or State level. As examples, HRSA funds Primary Care Associations (PCAs), PCOs, Area Health

Education Centers (AHECs), and State Offices of Rural Health (SORHs) which may be of assistance.

IV. Contact

For further assistance regarding this PAL, currently funded health center grantees and FQHC Look-Alikes are encouraged to contact their Project Officer. Health centers that are currently NHSC sites or interested in becoming NHSC sites may contact the RTSC (1-877-313-1823) or their State's Site Advisor. A list of the Site Advisors by State can be found at <http://nhsc.hrsa.gov/communities/callforhelp.htm>.

In addition, health centers may contact their PCO, PCA, and/or National Cooperative Agreement organizations for assistance on recruitment, retention, and best practices. A list of the PCOs can be found on the HRSA/Bureau of Health Professions Web site at <http://bhpr.hrsa.gov/shortage/pcos.htm>. A list of the PCAs and National Cooperative Agreement organizations can be found on the HRSA/Bureau of Primary Health Care Web site at <http://bphc.hrsa.gov/technicalassistance/ncadirectory.htm>.

If you have any questions regarding this PAL, please contact the Bureau of Primary Health Care, Office of Policy and Program Development at 301-594-4300.

/s/

James Macrae
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