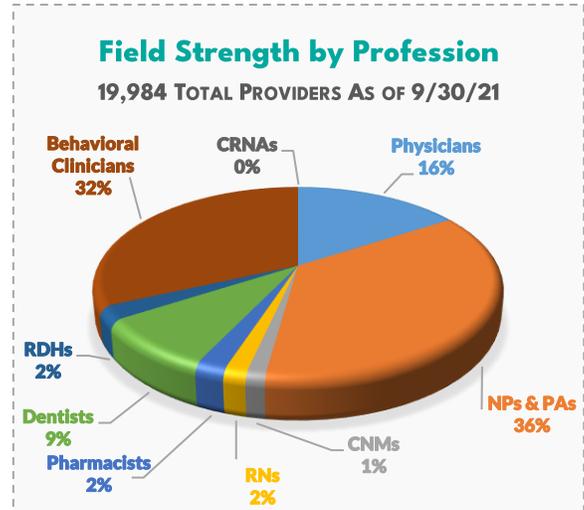


Background

The National Health Service Corps (NHSC) program, established in 1972, is designed to incentivize primary care professionals—including physicians, nurse practitioners, dentists, mental and behavioral health professionals, physician assistants, certified nurse-midwives, and dental hygienists—to work in underserved areas in rural and urban communities. In exchange for their service, the program helps to alleviate the burden of student debt through scholarship and loan repayment programs.

Since its founding, the NHSC has placed more than 66,000 providers in underserved communities, with nearly 20,000 members now providing care to more than 21 million patients. The NHSC has proven to be a successful, sustainable solution to the shortage of providers in thousands of communities across the U.S. More than 66% of NHSC clinicians who complete their service continue to practice in a federally designated Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA) up to one year later, and most continue to practice in HPSAs for over 10 years after completing their service. Nevertheless, the NHSC’s current field strength is but a fraction of the more than 52,000 providers necessary to fully meet needs in all HPSAs—needs that are only likely to become more acute due to attrition and COVID-19.



Current Funding

Today, the NHSC receives \$310 million in mandatory funding via a dedicated trust fund (which will expire at the end of FY2023) and \$121 million in annual discretionary appropriations. The 2021 American Rescue Plan COVID-19 relief package provided historic onetime investments of \$800 million, with a further \$100 million directed toward the Corps in 2022. However, if only trust and appropriations funding continue in the years to come, only a portion of Loan Repayment and Scholarship applicants will be granted awards, particularly once ARP funds run out. Collectively, more than 100 million individuals reside in HPSAs, and yet thousands of NHSC applications could go unfunded due to lack of resources. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic had dire effects in communities already suffering challenges with provider shortages. Without longterm, sustainable funding to accommodate the existing and growing need, underserved areas across the country which can least afford to deal with additional strains and shortages on their clinical workforce may reach a breaking point. Now more than ever, it is crucial to continue to fund and grow the NHSC to ensure access to care for millions of people living in shortage areas.

Legislative Request

The estimated cost to eliminate all existing HPSAs through the NHSC is approximately \$1.5 billion annually. We ask that Congress support legislation that ensures adequate and sustainable funding for the National Health Service Corps program and expands the program to address the urgent need for primary care in underserved communities across the country now and in the future.