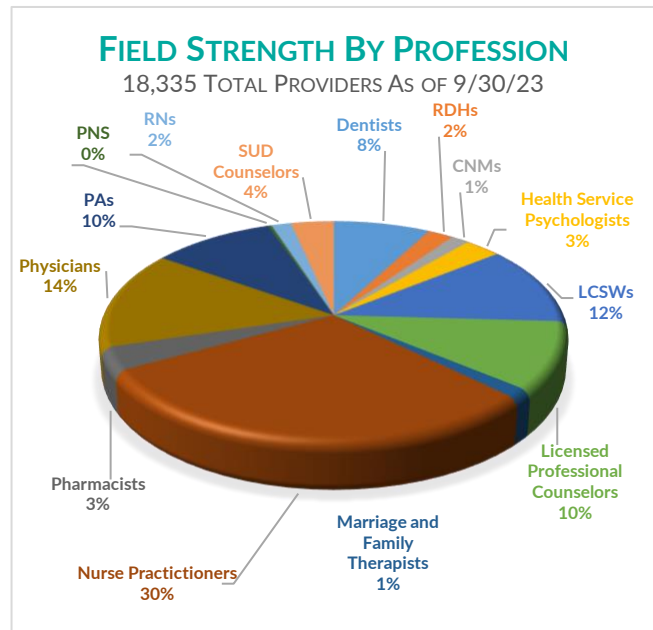


## Background

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 roughly 75,000 providers in underserved communities, with 18,335 members now providing care to more than 19 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 nearly 29,000 practitioners necessary to fully meet the primary care, dental health, and mental health needs in all HPSAs—needs that have only become more acute due to attrition.



## 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 \$125.6 million in annual discretionary appropriations. The urgent need to extend and bolster funding for the NHSC cannot be overstated as the nation continues to reel from severe clinician and healthcare workforce shortages, particularly in rural and underserved communities that can least afford further strain. HRSA currently estimates that more than 99 million Americans live in primary care health professional shortage areas (HPSAs), and nearly 13,000 practitioners are needed to remove the HPSA designation from those areas. If mandatory and discretionary funding levels don’t receive increases in FY24 and in the years to come, the NHSC’s field strength will decrease and only a small portion of Loan Repayment and Scholarship applicants will be granted awards.

### Legislative Request

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.

#### Please Cosponsor:

- 1) [S.2840](#), the *Bipartisan Primary Care and Health Workforce Act*
- 2) [H.R. 3080](#), the *Health Center Service Expansion and Provider Shortage Reduction Act*
- 3) [H.R.1711/S.940](#), the *Rural America Health Corps Act*

### NHSC Field Strength Trending in the Wrong Direction

	<u>2019</u>	<u>2020</u>	<u>2021</u>	<u>2022</u>	<u>2023</u>
<b>NHSC Total Award Amount</b>	<b>\$299.6M</b>	<b>\$437.9M</b>	<b>\$699.5M</b>	<b>\$684.7M</b>	<b>\$399.9M</b>
<b>NHSC Field Strength</b>	13,053	16,229	19,984	20,215	18,335
<b>SP (% of eligible applicants funded)</b>	10.7%	11.2%	60.1%	46.7%	6.2%
<b>LRP (% of eligible applicants funded)</b>	45.2%	66.2%	86.2%	71.2%	57.1%

Decreased total award amounts in the NHSC program over the last three years has reduced the NHSC's field strength by nearly 2,000 from FY22 to FY23. The urgent need to extend and bolster funding for the NHSC cannot be overstated as the nation continues to reel from severe clinician and healthcare workforce shortages, particularly in rural and underserved communities that can least afford further strain. If mandatory and discretionary funding levels don't receive increases in FY24 and in the years to come, the NHSC's field strength will continue to decrease and only a small portion of Loan Repayment and Scholarship applicants will be granted awards.

### The Consequences of Decreased NHSC Funding

	<u>FY22</u>	<u>FY23</u>
<b>NHSC Total Award Amount</b>	\$684.7M	\$399.9M
<b>Total Awards</b>	11,390	7,029
<b>Awards Breakdown</b>	7,705 for Loan Repayment	6,594 for Loan Repayment
	1,224 for Scholarships	228 for Scholarships
	368 for Student to Service Loan Repayment	157 for Student to Service Loan Repayment
	2,093 for State Loan Repayment Program	50 for State Loan Repayment Program

Congress needs to help the NHSC grow beyond its current field strength, but, at the very least, provide enough financial support to maintain the current field strength. **More funding for the Corps directly increases the number of funded applications to help alleviate the shortfall of filled clinician vacancies for underserved communities nationwide.** Unfortunately, a nearly \$285 million decrease in NHSC funding from FY22 to FY23 led to 4,361 (or 61.7%) fewer total awards when compared to the previous year.

\*All data was pulled from HRSA Fact Sheets FY14-23: <https://data.hrsa.gov/data/fact-sheets>