



**Statement of**

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**Health Resources and Services Administration  
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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) about the National Health Service Corps programs. HRSA focuses on improving access to health care services for people who are uninsured, isolated or medically vulnerable. HRSA's mission is to improve health and achieve health equity through access to quality services and a skilled health care workforce. There are approximately 80 different programs administered by HRSA.

One of these programs is the National Health Service Corps. For over 40 years, the National Health Service Corps has helped to build healthy communities by supporting qualified health care providers dedicated to working in areas of the United States with limited access to health care.

Thanks to historic investments from the Affordable Care Act and the Recovery Act, the numbers of clinicians in the National Health Service Corps are at all-time highs. The number of providers serving in the National Health Service Corps has nearly tripled from 3,600 in 2008 to nearly 10,000 in 2012, and they are providing care for millions more patients than the Corps was able to serve just three years ago.

The National Health Service Corps programs provide scholarships and repay educational loans for primary care physicians, dentists, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, behavioral health providers, residents and other primary care providers who agree to practice in areas of the country that need them most. Across this country, nearly 10,000 National Health Service Corps clinicians are providing care to more than 10.4 million people who live in rural, urban, and frontier communities.

Serving at National Health Service Corps approved sites that include local rural health clinics, community health centers, Tribal sites and other primary care sites, National Health Service Corps clinicians are working every day to not just treat illness or injury, but also to keep people healthy and prevent them from getting sick. They are providing check-ups for children, filling cavities, managing diabetes, providing mental health care, and monitoring chronic conditions for seniors.

Today, there are Corps clinicians providing primary medical, dental and mental health care in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands and other U.S. Territories. Physicians are the largest single discipline in the National Health Service Corps representing 26 percent of the nearly 10,000 Corps providers. And, National Health Service Corps mental and behavioral health care providers (Health Service Psychologists, Licensed Clinical Social Workers, Licensed Professional Counselors, Marriage and Family Therapists, and Psychiatric Nurse Specialists) have nearly quadrupled since 2008, increasing from approximately 700 to 2,800.

The full-time option under the National Health Service Corps Loan Repayment Program offers up to \$60,000 in loan repayment for two years of full-time service. At the end of two years, Corps members can apply to continue their service and receive additional loan repayment. National Health Service Corps scholars commit to serve in the Corps upon completion of their training, providing one year of service for each year of support (with a minimum two-year service obligation). The Students to Service Loan Repayment Pilot Program provides loan repayment assistance of up to \$120,000 to medical students (Medical Doctor and Doctor of Osteopathic

Medicine) in their last year of school, in return for a commitment to provide primary health care services in communities of greatest need for at least three years.

I have talked with doctors and nurses who say that they would never have been able to go into medicine or nursing without the National Health Service Corps Scholarship Program, because they and their families simply could not afford the cost of health professions training otherwise.

For most of our Corps clinicians, we know it is not just about the money. We have done the research and found that more than 55 percent of clinicians continue to practice in the communities that need them most 10 years after completing their service commitment. For example, Dr. Abbott is one of these amazing clinicians who has stayed long beyond his initial service commitment. Dr. Abbott was born in Brooklyn, New York, and attended Howard University College of Medicine. He completed his pediatric residency at Howard University Hospital and the District of Columbia Hospital. Dr. Abbott received a National Health Service Corps scholarship and began his service commitment at South Baltimore Family Health Center in July 1983. Nearly thirty years later, Dr. Abbott is still providing pediatric health services at this health center and was recently appointed to chief medical officer for the Family Health Centers of Baltimore. Dr. Abbott's story is just one of many stories that underscore the return on the investment of the National Health Service Corps and how this program helps ensure that communities have access to quality health care both today and in the future.

In addition to National Health Service Corps clinicians currently providing health care, the Corps also invests in the training of the next generation of providers through scholarships and the Students to Service Loan Repayment Pilot Program. There are currently more than 1,000 students and residents preparing to go into practice who are receiving support from these programs. As part of their National Health Service Corps' commitment, these future primary care providers will serve in communities where they are needed most.

The National Health Service Corps scholarship and loan repayment programs are highly competitive. In fiscal year (FY) 2012, with data as of September 30, 2012, the National Health Service Corps Loan Repayment Program received 5,715 new applications and funded 2,342 new awards, which represents 41 percent of submitted applications. In addition, there were 1,925 continuation contracts, extending service for another year. Taken with these continuation contracts, the Loan Repayment Program invested \$169 million in the primary care workforce. The National Health Services Corps Scholarship Program received 1,373 new applications and funded 212 new awards, which represents 15 percent of submitted applications. Overall, the Scholarship Program issued 222 awards (212 new and 10 continuation contracts) totaling \$42 million.

National Health Service Corps providers serve in National Health Service Corps approved sites, which are sites that meet defined criteria demonstrating their need and that expand access to care by providing services regardless of a patient's ability to pay. There are currently more than 14,000 approved National Health Services Corps sites, and Site Administrators regularly report that eligibility for the National Health Service Corps programs are a valuable recruitment tool for health care providers.

In 2012, HRSA launched the interactive National Health Service Corps Jobs Center to allow National Health Service Corps sites to post key information to recruit prospective job applicants, such as services offered, community information, photos, and site brochures, so the prospective applicant can learn not only about the specific site, but also about the community they will serve. The launching of the NHSC Jobs Center has significantly increased the number of prospective job applicants interested in positions in eligible communities. We are looking forward to providing all NHSC sites with robust recruitment opportunities with access to thousands of primary care providers through the Jobs Center.

With 45 percent of the nearly 10,000 Corps clinicians currently providing care in rural communities, HRSA has adapted to better meet the need for primary care providers in rural and frontier areas. For example, HRSA expanded eligibility for the National Health Service Corps sites to Critical Access Hospitals in FY 2012. As of October 2012, 134 Critical Access Hospitals had been approved as National Health Service Corps service sites, and an additional 71 applications were under review as part of this initiative. Additionally, in FY 2013, the National Health Service Corps began allowing providers practicing in eligible sites to offer telemedicine services to patients at distant sites. Designed to extend the reach of National Health Service Corps providers while minimizing patients' travel distances to seek care, this initiative has been particularly significant in increasing access to mental and behavioral health services in rural areas.

In addition to encouraging a geographically well-distributed primary care workforce, the National Health Service Corps supports a racially and ethnically diverse primary care workforce. According to the most recent self-reports by the nearly 10,000 Corps clinicians currently providing care – 13 percent are African American, 10 percent are Hispanic, 7 percent are Asian or Pacific Islander, and 2 percent are American Indian or Alaska Native. In FY 2012, African American physicians represented 17 percent of the Corps physicians, which exceeds their 6.3 percent representation within the national physician workforce. Hispanic physicians represented 16 percent of the Corps physicians, exceeding their 5.5 percent representation in the national physician workforce.

Also, according to these self-reports, more than half of the nearly 1,000 Corps scholars in the pipeline, currently in school or residency training, are racial and ethnic minorities – 26 percent are Hispanic, 19 percent are African American, 12 percent are Asian or Pacific Islander, and 2 percent are American Indian or Alaska Native.

At its heart, the National Health Service Corps is about bringing primary care to communities in need. The Corps is able to do this while making it possible for those with a passion and commitment to serve to pursue their dreams. The National Health Service Corps removes financial barriers for clinicians and students interested in practicing a primary care discipline, enabling them to pursue a fulfilling, mission-driven, community-based career.

Thank you again for providing me the opportunity to share HRSA's and the National Health Service Corps' mission with you today. I am pleased to respond to your questions.