



Oregon Office of Rural Health

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House Committee on Health Care  
February 5, 2014  
Oregon Primary Health Care Loan Forgiveness Program  
RE: Support HB 4137  
Robert Duehmig, Communications Director  
Oregon Office of Rural Health  
Oregon Health and Science University

Chair Greenlick and Members of the Committee:

My name is Robert Duehmig and I work for the Oregon Office of Rural Health. Our office administers the Oregon Primary Health Care Loan Forgiveness Program (Loan Forgiveness Program). The Loan Forgiveness Program is currently the only provider incentive program that is specifically targeted to rural health care providers. The Loan Forgiveness Program was created by the Legislature in 2011 with a \$500K appropriation. In 2013, the Legislature again funded the program with a \$1M appropriation.

The Loan Forgiveness Program is a long-term investment in Oregon's health care workforce. Unlike loan repayment programs that are designed to encourage a provider to practice in a specific area now, the Loan Forgiveness Program is designed to ensure that we will have providers in the future, when they have completed their training. The Loan Forgiveness Program Advisory Committee is made up of a representative of Pacific University Physician Assistant (PA) rural track program, OHSU School Of Nursing (SON) rural track program, OHSU School Of Medicine (SOM) rural track program and College of Osteopathic Medicine of the Pacific Northwest (CompNW) rural track program.

There are four programs that participate in the Program: OHSU SOM, OHSU SON and Pacific University PA program and Comp NW. Comp NW has just recently approved a rural track program and this will be the first year of their participation in the program. To qualify for participation, a school must have a specific Rural Track Program, separate from their regular training track. Minimum requirements for Rural Track designation are:

- Academic designation as a track or program within a school of medicine, osteopathy, physician assistant, nurse practitioner/doctor of nursing practice, dentistry or pharmacy;
- The primary purpose of the track or program is the production of health care practitioners to serve Oregon's rural communities;
- Program or track has selective admission based on student criteria and attributes that contribute to likelihood of rural practice selection;
- Program or track has curricular elements with rural focus (may include didactics, projects, research) specific to the track or program. The program or track cannot just duplicate the curriculum received by all students;

- Program or track connects students to mentoring and career advising with faculty (paid or volunteer) who have rural practice experience and expertise;
- At least 10% of required clinical training in the track or program occurs in rural clinical settings.

Students enrolled in an approved rural track program are eligible to apply for the Loan Forgiveness Program. It does not however, guarantee they will receive an award. Awardees may borrow up to \$35,000 per year for their second and subsequent years of medical, nurse practitioner or physician assistant training.

Participants in this program must agree to meet the following criteria:

- One year of clinical service in an approved rural Oregon practice site in exchange for each year of loans granted through this program.
- Service must begin no later than 90 days following completion of a primary care residency, physician assistant or nurse practitioner training program.
- Participant must provide a minimum of 32 hours/week of clinical practice in an approved rural Oregon site.
- Eligible practice sites must be located in a rural federally designated Health Professional Shortage Area ([HPSA](#)) or Medically Underserved Area ([MUA](#)), or [Area of Unmet Healthcare Need](#) as designated by the Oregon Office of Rural Health.

If an awardee fails to meet these criteria, they must repay the loan plus 25% interest. So only those who, early in their training, know they want to practice in a rural setting apply for these loans.

During the 2012 cycles, the ORH awarded loan forgiveness to four physicians and one NP. The 2013 cycles included four physicians and one PA. Applications for the 2014 cycles are due in our office by April 7, 2014. Until then, it will be difficult to determine the demand for this year.

While this is a long-term investment, the program already has providers entering the field and working in rural Oregon. One Nurse Practitioner began service in the fall of 2013 and this spring, a Physician Assistant will graduate and begin service, and our first family medicine physician has already begun her residency.

The Oregon Primary Care Loan Forgiveness Program is one of several programs that the Office of Rural Health is currently administering to help Oregon meet its need for primary care providers – and the only one solely dedicated to rural practice. This is an important investment in Oregon’s future and we look forward to working with all of the participating programs to ensure its success.