

PCO Guidelines for Creating Health Professional Shortage Area Applications for Mental Health

The US Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), Office of Shortage Designation (OSD), provides guidelines for determining federally qualified health professional shortage areas (HPSAs). The HPSAs identify an area or population as having a shortage of primary care, dental or mental health providers. There are three types of HPSA designations: Primary Care, Dental, and Mental Health. HPSAs may be **geographic, population group, facility, or automatic**. The designations provide both federal and state government benefits for communities, health care facilities and providers who participate in the federal loan repayment programs.

A Geographic HPSA designation demonstrates a shortage of providers for the total population of an area.

A Population Group HPSA designation demonstrates a shortage of providers for population groups. A Population Group must be one of the following:

- Low income populations (greater than 30% of population with incomes at or below 200% of the federal poverty level)
- Migrant and/or seasonal farmworkers and families
- Medicaid - eligible
- Native Americans/Native Alaskan
- Homeless Populations
- Other populations isolated from access by means of a specified language, cultural barriers, or handicaps

A Facility HPSA designation is only for facilities including community health centers, rural health clinics, and federal correctional institutions. Each HPSA is given a score by the OSD based on specific criteria for each type of HPSA. This score indicates the degree of shortage.

An Automatic HPSA designation refers to the designations given to the federally qualified health centers as defined by Section 330 of the Public Health Service Act (42 U.S.C. §254b).

All Mental Health HPSA applications take into consideration the following criteria:

- Population-to-provider ratio**
- Percent of individuals below 100% of the federal poverty level
- Youth ratio (ratio of children under 18 to adults ages 18-64)
- Elderly ratio (ratio of adults over 65 to adults ages 18-64)
- Substance abuse prevalence
- Alcohol abuse prevalence
- Average travel time or distance to nearest source of non-designated accessible care

**Population-to-Provider Ratios			
<u>HPSA</u>	<u>Geographic</u>	<u>Population</u>	<u>Geo.w/ High Need</u>
Mental Health	30,000:1	20,000:1	20,000:1 (Psychiatrists)

Primary Care Office (PCO) staff within the Department of Public Health (DPH) submits HPSA applications through a web-based GIS application to HRSA for approval. The first step taken when creating a HPSA application is to develop a rational service area which entails locating a specific area where the majority of the population would expect to receive health care services. Types of Rational

Services Areas include counties, sub counties including towns (minor civil divisions), cities, or census tracts. The application must address the area's population as having similar socio-economic characteristics, such as the percent of population below 100% of the federal poverty level, or the percent of population below 200% of the federal poverty level, the racial/ethnic distribution, physical access barriers (e.g., bordered by state forest, mountains, river without bridge access, interstates, and highways), public transportation patterns, and the area having an established neighborhood and/or community which displays a strong self-identity. Rational service area boundaries must be established by measuring from the population center of the proposed service area (census tracts or minor civil division with the highest resident civilian population), the outer boundaries of the service area should not exceed the travel times of forty minutes.

The PCO staff prepares the application consistent with the HRSA criteria established for federal designations. When preparing a mental health HPSA application, surveys are conducted of all psychiatrists who provide mental health care in a proposed service area, or who provide direct care or consultation and supervision, and practice in ambulatory or other short term care settings. All providers with 40 or more hours of direct patient care per week are counted as 1.0 FTE. HRSA limits the required provider mental health information for applications to psychiatrists, however if an area is designated as a HPSA, other critical mental health professionals can participate in the federal loan repayment program in the designated area. (Other mental health professionals that can provide services and participate in the federal loan repayment program are: Psychologists, Psychiatric Nurse Specialists, Marriage and Family Therapists, and Licensed Professional Counselors).

Once the rational service area has been defined, the availability of providers within areas 30 or 40 minutes (North, Northeast, East, Southeast, South, Southwest, West, and Northwest) must be assessed to determine if providers in these areas are either over-utilized or inaccessible to the population of the proposed service area. If any area demonstrates significant demographic disparities (socio-economic, racial/ethnic) from the rational service area, then the area is considered inaccessible. Significant physical barriers include mountains, large parks, bodies of water, highways, railway yards, industrial areas, etc. which result in the population being isolated from nearby resources. Provider services in the surrounding areas that are 30 or 40 minutes from the population center are considered excessively distant and not accessible.

In addition to the mapping component for all designation application requests, a written justification is submitted to explain the importance of obtaining a federal designation. Once the application is submitted to HRSA, the general public has thirty days to provide comments to the proposed designation. HRSA has established a timeline to review and make a final determination within three months from submission. All HPSA designations are re-evaluated every three years.

Resources:

1. Federal Shortage Designation Program: <http://bhpr.hrsa.gov/shortage/hpsas/>
2. Federal Loan Repayment Program: <http://nhsc.hrsa.gov/loanrepayment/>