

Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSA) and NHSC Scholars:

Disciplines, Designations, and Your Future Service Site

Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs) are designated by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) as having shortages of primary care medical, dental, or mental health providers. National Health Service Corps Scholars must work at an NHSC-approved site of greatest need, as defined by a HPSA designation, or score. By law, “greatest need” is determined annually.

Here is a quick guide to HPSAs, disciplines, designations, and your future NHSC service site.

- **Disciplines.** Often a site will have a different HPSA score for different disciplines—primary care medical, dental, or mental health. For example, a site may have a dental HPSA score of 18, but only a primary care HPSA of 6. In this example, an NHSC Scholar who is a dentist may seek a position at this site, but this site would not be an option for a doctor or a nurse. You must work at a site that holds a HPSA score determined for your year and discipline (primary care medical, dental, or mental health). When you begin to search for a position, make sure you look at the site’s HPSA score closely.

- **Designations.** Within each discipline (primary care medical, dental, or mental health), there are different types of HPSA designations. HPSA designations may be: 1) *geographic* (a county or service area) meaning all individuals in an area have insufficient access to care; 2) *population group* (low income population, migrant farm workers, etc.) meaning a subpopulation of people living in the area has insufficient access to care; or, for some types of sites, 3) *facility* (federally qualified health center, rural health clinic, etc.) where individuals served by a specific facility have insufficient access to care. For the purpose of selecting a site, you don’t need to worry about the HPSA designation. If you are a nurse for example, you can go to a site with a primary care HPSA score designated for your year whether it has a geographic or facility HPSA score. However, the score may provide more insight into the attributes of the service site.

- **Your Future Service Site.** With a better understanding of HPSAs, you can begin your search for an NHSC-approved site. Start by visiting the NHSC Jobs Center at nhscjobs.hrsa.gov. There you can narrow your site search by state, discipline, and HPSA score, among other things. Your NHSC Regional Advisor is always available to assist you, and NHSC partners, such as state primary care offices and state primary care associations, may help to support your job search. Find their information at: NHSC.hrsa.gov/currentmembers/scholars.

