

The Rural Health Initiative: Advancing Pharmacist Care for Rural Communities in Washington State



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BACKGROUND

The Problem:

The State of Washington has 3.5 million residents living in primary care shortage areas and 800,000 living in rural communities. The state needs almost 800 new providers to eliminate those gaps in care access.¹ Sixteen counties in eastern Washington are designated mostly or completely medically underserved or include large medically underserved populations and all eastern Washington counties are considered health professional shortage areas in reference to access to primary care.² Six eastern Washington counties rank lowest in the state in terms of overall health outcomes including length of life and quality of life.³

The Solution:

Access to quality care was recognized as the most frequently identified rural health priority according to Rural Healthy People 2020, the rural counterpart to Healthy People 2020.⁴ Expanding access to health professions education and specifically pharmacy education and the patient care services provided by pharmacists in rural communities is one solution to address the health disparities present in the state.

OBJECTIVE

The Rural Health Initiative was created to meet a three-fold goal:

Increase access to pharmacy education for students from rural communities.

Prepare pharmacy graduates with specialized knowledge and skills for effectively serving rural communities.

Advance rural pharmacy practice through development and implementation of innovative and sustainable business and care models.

METHODS

Access to Pharmacy Education

- Develop and expand mentorship programs with rural school districts in eastern Washington.
- Develop and expand pathways into health professions education including partnerships with technical and community colleges in rural Washington counties.
- Provide mentoring and scholarship support for students accepted into the Rural Health Track.

Provide Specialized Rural Health Curriculum and Training Opportunities

- Offer a specialized curricular training track in Rural Pharmacy Practice:
 - Introduction to Rural Healthcare and Research Methods
 - Introduction to Rural Healthcare, Rural Practice and Research Methods
 - Rural Health Elective III: Policy, Advocacy and Legislature for Rural Health
 - Rural Health Elective IV: Professional Development for the Rural Practitioner
- Rural Health Track students complete a longitudinal, community-based research project.
- Designate IPPE and APPE rotation sites as rural health preferred or qualified.
- Create Post-graduate Residency training programs in rural community pharmacy and behavioral health.

Advance Rural Pharmacy Practice

- Identify partners for shared faculty positions in ambulatory care, community practice, and behavioral health in rural sites throughout Washington State.
- Support rural practitioners in implementing sustainable business and innovative rural pharmacy care services.

RESULTS

COHORT 1: Class of 2025

- ❖ 5 students selected
- ❖ Completed first two rural track elective courses
- ❖ Completed community and institutional IPPE at rural sites
- ❖ Capstone projects in progress

COHORT 2: Class of 2026

- ❖ 4 students selected
- ❖ Completed community IPPE at a rural site
- ❖ Will begin rural track electives Fall 2023

- Articulation agreements in place with Community Colleges of Spokane, Yakima Valley College, and Heritage University
- \$10,000/year scholarship provided to each RHI student.
- Rural Health Track curriculum implemented for AY 22-23 and updated for AY 23-24.
- Preferred and qualified IPPE and APPE sites designated in CORE ELMS.
- Identifying partner sites for post-graduate training programs – community pharmacy & behavioral health.
- First RHI faculty member hired in ambulatory care in southwest Washington state.
- Development of a clinical faculty position in community pharmacy in central Washington.
- Partnering with regional Accountable Community of Health on study of innovative pharmacy service.

CONCLUSION

A multi-pronged approach is necessary to recruit students from rural areas and to prepare them to return to those communities to advance access to pharmacy and pharmacist care.

REFERENCES

1. PSA Find Tool in HRSA. <https://data.hrsa.gov/tools/shortage-area/hpsa-find>. Accessed 5 July 2023.
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