



Texas Community Health Centers

Bolster the Texas primary care provider workforce by fully appropriating available funds for the Physician Education Loan Repayment Program.

Texas continues to face a severe shortage of primary care physicians. **In 2013, 27 Texas counties had no physician providing direct care and 19 had only one.** In 2014, Texas' population to primary care provider ratio was 1,743:1, compared to the national average of 1,485:1. Currently, **the majority of Texas counties are either full or partial primary care Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs)**, a federal designation for areas without sufficient health care providers to cover the needs of the population.

Total number of primary care HPSAs in Texas:	375
Number of Texas counties with a HPSA designation (all or part of the county):	216
Number of additional providers needed to remove HPSAs in Texas today:	514

Evidence shows that patients with readily available access to primary care have improved health outcomes at lower costs. Barriers to care resulting from provider shortages cause patients to delay treatment and risk developing more serious conditions, or to seek care in more costly settings such as hospital emergency departments.

The Texas Physician Education Loan Repayment Program (PELRP) provides loan repayment funds of up to \$160,000 over a period of four years to physicians who agree to practice in Health Professional Shortage Areas. The PELRP is a vital tool used by safety net providers, such as community health centers, to attract physicians to work in areas facing the most severe shortages across the state. The PELRP is funded through a smokeless tobacco tax, with funds accumulating at over \$30 million per year. However, all available funds have not been appropriated by the Legislature, and **the PELRP fund currently has a \$120 million unspent balance.**

Under current PELRP allocations, up to 182 physicians were able to receive initial-year awards in FY 2014, with a goal to enroll another 100 in FY 2015. In contrast, **if all available funds in the PELRP account were allocated, an estimated 275 physicians could be enrolled annually.**

Additionally, federal funding for another program utilized to attract physicians to underserved areas, the National Health Service Corps, is set to expire in October 2015 when the federal health center funding cliff takes effect. If the National Health Service Corps is no longer available, the PELRP will become an even more important tool to attract physicians to serve in underserved areas in Texas.

Health centers urge the Legislature to appropriate all available funds in the PELRP account to increase the number of PELRP slots available to Texas physicians practicing in underserved areas.