

Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs)

Throughout the U.S., there are geographic areas, populations, and facilities seen as having too few primary care, dental, and mental health providers. As part of efforts to alleviate these shortages, the federal government designates health professional shortage areas and ties certain program eligibility or awarding preference to these designations.

How HPSA designations help to alleviate shortages



GRANTS

HPSAs receive priority for grants (e.g., certain rural health and oral health programs).



SCHOLARSHIPS & LOANS

Certain health providers can receive scholarships or loan repayment through the National Health Service Corps (NHSC) or through the NURSE Corps in exchange for providing two or more years of care in a HPSA. Priority for being assigned these providers is given to facilities/areas with higher HPSA scores.



MEDICARE & MEDICAID RATES

Outpatient facilities in HPSAs certified as rural health clinics or federally qualified health centers receive higher Medicare and Medicaid payment rates.



MEDICARE BONUS

Providers in areas designated as HPSAs can receive Medicare bonus payments.

How HPSAs are designated

The majority of areas, populations, and facilities must apply for a HPSA designation. The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), within the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and State Primary Care Offices (PCOs) work together using public, private, and state-provided data to determine when such a shortage qualifies for designation as a HPSA. Certain facilities are automatically designated as HPSAs (e.g., health centers and facilities that serve American Indians and Alaska Natives), and governors may designate shortage areas.

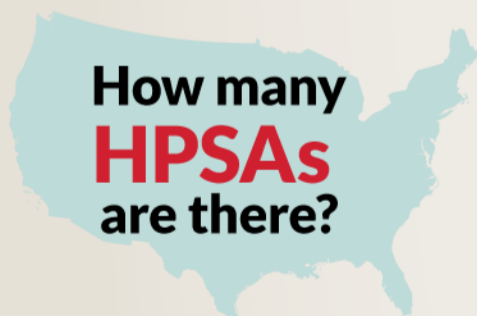
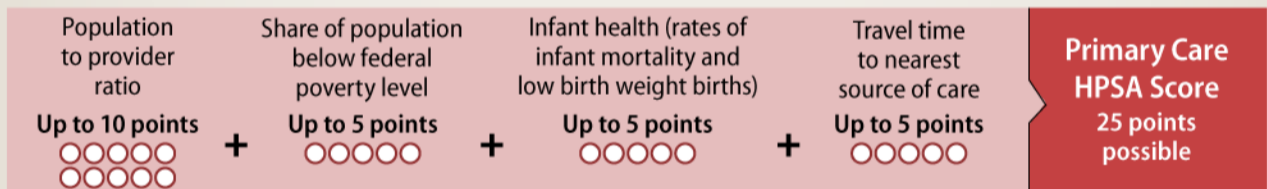
APPLICATION PROCESS

(Facilities or governor-designated areas that are automatically designated as HPSAs skip to the scoring process.)



How HPSAs are scored

Each type of HPSA—primary care, dental health, and mental health—is scored differently. HPSAs scores range from 0 to 25 for primary care and mental health, and 0 to 26 for dental health. A higher HPSA score indicates a greater shortage and may be given priority in programs that use HPSA scores for award-making criteria (e.g., NHSC). Below is an example of Primary Care HPSA Scoring:



As of October 30, 2019

Numbers are approximate. Areas, populations, and facilities can receive multiple designations.



PRIMARY CARE

78
million people live in **7,590** HPSAs
14,164
providers are needed



DENTAL HEALTH

56
million people live in **6,786** HPSAs
9,960
providers are needed



MENTAL HEALTH

113
million people live in **6,072** HPSAs
6,174
providers are needed

HRSA's Next Steps: Shortage Designation Modernization Project



The criteria used to designate HPSAs have not been updated since 1978. However, between 2013 and 2019, HRSA has undertaken the Shortage Designation Modernization Project, which aims to standardize the data used to designate and score HPSAs. Some designated HPSAs saw their scores increase or decrease as a result of this process.

Author Information

Elayne J. Heisler
Specialist in Health Services

Disclaimer

This document was prepared by the Congressional Research Service (CRS). CRS serves as nonpartisan shared staff to congressional committees and Members of Congress. It operates solely at the behest of and under the direction of Congress. Information in a CRS Report should not be relied upon for purposes other than public understanding of information that has been provided by CRS to Members of Congress in connection with CRS's institutional role. CRS Reports, as a work of the United States Government, are not subject to copyright protection in the United States. Any CRS Report may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without permission from CRS. However, as a CRS Report may include copyrighted images or material from a third party, you may need to obtain the permission of the copyright holder if you wish to copy or otherwise use copyrighted material.