



American Indian Health Scholars Program

The Need

According to the Indian Health Service (IHS), federal Indian health programs often have difficulty recruiting and retaining health professionals in a competitive hiring market. These difficulties are primarily the result of geographic and professional isolation. The IHS physician vacancy rate is 17%, the dental vacancy rate is 31%, the pharmacy vacancy rate is 11% and the nursing vacancy rate is 18% (Indian Health Service Workforce Fact Sheet; January 2008).

Significant health disparities exist between American Indians and the general population. According to the IHS Indian Health Disparities Fact Sheet (January 2008):

- American Indians have a life expectancy that is 2.4 years less than the U.S. all races population (74.5 to 76.9 years; 1999-2001 rates)
- American Indians die at higher rates than other Americans from tuberculosis (750% higher), alcoholism (550% higher), diabetes (190% higher), unintentional injuries (150% higher), homicide (100% higher) and suicide (70% higher). (Rates adjusted for misreporting of Indian race on state death certificates; 2002-2004 rates.)

The Institute of Medicine recommends increasing the number of minority health professionals as a key strategy to eliminating health disparities. Minority health professionals disproportionately serve minority and other medically underserved populations. Research holds that patients tend to receive better personal care from practitioners of their own race and/or ethnicity. These findings indicate that greater diversity among health professionals will likely lead to improved healthcare delivery and care for underserved populations. It will also increase opportunities for minority patients to be treated by health care professionals with whom they share a common race, ethnicity or language (The Rationale for Diversity in the Health Professions: A Review of the Evidence; U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services, Health Resources & Services Administration, Bureau of Health Professions; October 2006).

Our Response

The goal of United Health Foundation's Diverse Scholars Initiative is to increase the number of qualified college graduates entering the health workforce. We believe that investing in the development of health professionals of diverse, multicultural backgrounds will help improve the quality of culturally-proficient health care delivery, close the health disparities gap, and improve long term health outcomes.

Our American Indian Health Scholars Program is administered through the American Indian College Fund. Please visit their Web site (www.collegefund.org) for further information and details.

Students will be selected from Diné College, Tohono O'odham Community College, as well as Arizona State University, University of Arizona and Northern Arizona State University.

Learn more about United Health
Foundation's Diverse Scholars Initiative at
<http://www.unitedhealthfoundation.org/dsi.html>.



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