

North Dakota Primary Care Office

Health Workforce Shortage Designations

One of the activities of the North Dakota Primary Care Office (ND PCO) is to submit Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA) designation requests and updates in the disciplines of primary care, mental health, and dental. In addition, the ND PCO is responsible for submitting Medically Underserved Area and Population (MUA/P) designation requests.

The HPSA designation is used to identify areas and population groups within the United States that are experiencing a shortage of health professionals in the disciplines of primary care, dental health, and mental health. Within each discipline, there are three types of designations, including the geographic area, population designation, or facility designation. The HPSA designation was originally developed for the National Health Service Corps to prioritize its resources. The primary factor used to determine a HPSA designation is the number of health professionals relative to the population with consideration of high need. In addition, contiguous area analysis must indicate that health professional services are overutilized, excessively distant, or inaccessible to the population under consideration. HPSA designations are required to be updated on a regular basis or as requested, such as when there is a change in provider FTE. New designations are submitted upon request.

The MUA/P designation was initially developed as a prerequisite to requesting grant awards to plan, develop, and operate a community health center. These designations measure degree of underservice and are designated as having too few primary care providers, high infant mortality, high poverty, and/or a high elderly population. MUA/P designations do not require updates.

Although several other programs have attached eligibility or priority to these designations, including but not limited to the Medicare Incentive Payment Program, J1-Visa Waiver Program, and RHC Program, the HPSA was initially developed for the National Health Service Corps for prioritization of its resources and the MUA/P for the development of community health centers with the original legislation being enacted under Section 332 of the Public Health Service Act and under Section 330 of the Public Service Act respectively in the 1970s. In 2002, the Health Care Safety Net Amendments authorized the automatic facility designation for Federally Qualified Health Centers, tribally-run clinics, urban Indian organizations, dual-funded tribal health centers, and federally-run Indian Health Service clinics, in addition to a simple application process for Rural Health Clinics to be designated.

Once a HPSA or MUA/P designation request or update is submitted, interested stakeholders are sent a letter indicating that a submission has been made and the designation request is put under a mandatory 30-day comment period providing the opportunity to submit comments regarding such a request. Following the 30-day comment period, the Shortage Designation Branch has 30-60 days to review and render a decision on the designation request or return it for additional information. Once a decision has been made by the Shortage Designation Branch, the stakeholders again will receive notification of the approval or denial of the designation request. The ND PCO has developed a list of those to receive notification of all requests, including the Governor's Office, North Dakota Department of Health, ND PCO director, the Community Healthcare Association of the Dakotas, and the University of North Dakota Center for Rural Health. In addition, the North Dakota Medical Association, Mental Health America of North Dakota, North Dakota Dental Association, Department of Human Services Behavioral Health Services Division, and North Dakota Department of Health Oral Health Program receive notifications of designation requests in their respective disciplines. This list can be updated at any time to change, add, or remove stakeholders receiving notifications.

For further information, contact

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