

Section 333A(a)(1)(A) of the PHS Act requires that the Secretary give priority in assignment of NHSC personnel to entities serving HPSAs with the greatest health professional shortage. Section 333A(c) of the PHS Act requires that the Secretary establish criteria specifying the manner in which he determines HPSAs of greatest shortage and published in the **Federal Register**.

The Secretary is developing a new method for designating HPSAs and determining HPSAs of greatest shortage. A Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM), relating to primary care HPSAs, was initially published in 1998. Major revisions were made in response to the comments received, and the Secretary anticipates publishing a new NPRM this year. Subsequent to the adoption of a new rule relating to primary care HPSAs, the Secretary intends to propose new methods for designating dental care and mental health care HPSAs and to publish new criteria for determining HPSAs of greatest shortage for primary care, dental care and mental health care HPSAs. In the interim, to determine HPSAs of greatest shortage, the Secretary will continue to use the current criteria set forth in this notice.

Approach for Determining Greatest Shortages

1. Three factors (population-to-provider ratio, poverty rate, and travel distance/time to nearest accessible source of care) are applicable to all categories of HPSAs (primary care, dental and mental health).

2. Additional factors specifically related to each HPSA category are included (*e.g.*, infant mortality/low birth weight rates (IMR/LBW) for primary care; presence of fluoridated water for dental; ratios of the population under 18 and over 65 and the prevalence of alcohol or substance abuse for mental health).

3. A scale is developed for scoring each factor. The scale generally includes five scoring levels, and reflects different patient utilization patterns for primary care, dental and mental health services.

4. Relative weights for the various factors are established, based on the significance of the factors in determining a shortage.

5. Each HPSA is scored on each factor.

6. The factor scores are weighted and summed for each HPSA.

7. The total scores for each HPSA are ranked from highest to lowest for each HPSA category.

8. A level is selected annually to identify the boundary between the

HPSAs of greatest shortage and all other HPSAs.

9. Those HPSAs with total scores equal to or greater than the selected boundary level within each category are identified as the HPSAs of greatest shortage.

Criteria for Determining Primary Care HPSAs of Greatest Shortage

Note: GE is defined as greater than or equal to.

1. Score for population-to-full-time-equivalent primary care physician (PCP) ratio:

Ratio > 10,000:1, or No PCPs and Population GE 2500 = 5 points
10,000:1 > Ratio GE 5,000:1, or No PCPs and Population GE 2000 = 4 points;
5,000:1 > Ratio GE 4,000:1, or No PCPs and Population GE 1500 = 3 points;
4,000:1 > Ratio GE 3,500:1, or No PCPs and Population GE 1000 = 2 points;
3,500:1 > Ratio > 3,000:1, or No PCPs and Population GE 500 = 1 point.

2. Score for percent of population with incomes below poverty level (P):

P GE 50% = 5 points;
50% > P GE 40% = 4 points;
40% > P GE 30% = 3 points;
30% > P GE 20% = 2 points;
20% > P GE 15% = 1 point;
P < 15% = 0 points.

3. Infant Health Index:

IMR GE 20 or LBW GE 13 = 5 points;
20>IMR>18 OR 13>LBW>11 = 4 points;
18>IMR>15 or 11>LBW>10 = 3 points;
15>IMR>12 or 10>LBW>9 = 2 points;
12>IMR>10 or 9>LBW>7 = 1 point;
IMR<10 or LBW<7 = 0 points.

4. Score for travel distance/time to nearest source of accessible care outside the HPSA:

Nearest Source of Care is defined as the closest location where the residents of the area or population that is designated have access to comprehensive primary care services.
Time GE 60 minutes or Distance GE 50 miles = 5 points;
60 min > Time GE 50 min or 50 mi > Dist GE 40 mi = 4 points;
50 min > Time GE 40 min or 40 mi > Dist GE 30 mi = 3 points;
40 min > Time GE 30 min or 30 mi > Dist GE 20 mi = 2 points;
30 min > Time GE 20 min or 20 mi > Dist GE 10 mi = 1 point;
Time < 20 min or Dist < 10 mi = 0 points.

Criteria for Determining Dental HPSAs of Greatest Shortage

1. Score for population-to-full-time-equivalent provider ratio:

Ratio GE 10,000:1, or no dentists and population GE 3,000 = 5 points;

10,000:1 > Ratio GE 8,000:1, or no dentists and population GE 2,500 = 4 points;

8,000:1 > Ratio GE 6,000:1, or no dentists and population GE 2,000 = 3 points;

6,000:1 > Ratio GE 5,000:1, or no dentists and population GE 1,500 = 2 points;

5,000:1 > Ratio GE 4,000:1, or no dentists and population GE 1,000 = 1 point.

2. Score for percent of population with incomes below poverty level (P):

P GE 50% = 5 points;
50% > P GE 40% = 4 points;
40% > P GE 30% = 3 points;
30% > P GE 20% = 2 points;
20% > P GE 15% = 1 point;
P < 15% = 0 points.

3. Score for travel distance/time to nearest source of accessible care outside the HPSA:

Nearest Source of Care is defined as the closest location where the residents of the area or population that is designated have access to dental care services.

Time GE 90 minutes or Distance GE 60 miles = 5 points;
90 min > Time GE 75 min or 60 mi > Dist GE 50 mi = 4 points;
75 min > Time GE 60 min or 50 mi > Dist GE 40 mi = 3 points;
60 min > Time GE 45 min or 40 mi > Dist GE 30 mi = 2 points;
45 min > Time GE 30 min or 30 mi > Dist GE 20 mi = 1 point;
Time < 30 min or Dist < 20 mi = 0 points.

4. Score for Fluoridation:

Fluoridated Water Available for ≥50% of Population = 0 points;
Fluoridated Water Available for <50% of Population = 1 point.

For primary care and dental care HPSAs, the population-to-practitioner ratio is double weighted, as it is a primary factor in the designation of HPSAs under section 332 of the PHS Act. The poverty rate is also doubled. The poverty rate is widely acknowledged in professional literature as a key measure of need for primary health services, and income levels have been shown to correlate directly with access to health care and with health status measures. This results in a maximum possible score of 26 points.

Criteria for Determining Mental Health HPSAs of Greatest Shortage

1. Score for population-to-full-time-equivalent provider ratio:

The reporting of the number of psychiatrists present is required in all mental health HPSA applications; the