



Health Care Workforce Center

MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Project Summary

April 2011



Results from a Survey of Past Participants in the Massachusetts Loan Repayment Program for Health Professionals*

Importance

The survey evaluates the effectiveness of the Massachusetts Loan Repayment Program (MLRP) for Health Professionals in recruiting and retaining primary care professionals in underserved areas of the Commonwealth. A secondary purpose was to evaluate programmatic functions and identify areas for improvement.

Methodology

From PCO databases, 154 loan repayment recipients from 1988-2009 were identified and mailed a 28 item survey. Prior to administration, the survey was tested with both current and former MLRP participants. A total of 49 surveys were returned completed; 29 surveys were returned as undeliverable.¹ The response rate was 39%.

Findings

For survey respondents the MLRP aids in the financial feasibility of employment in underserved areas. 94% of survey respondents worked at their MLRP obligation site before applying to the program and 84% of respondents had previous professional experience with medically underserved populations. 65% indicated that a chance to work with underserved populations was a 'very important' factor in their decision to apply to the MLRP program.

23 respondents (47%) were currently working at their MLRP obligation site, while another 13 respondents (26%) remained between 3 to 10 years after completing the program. 5 remained an additional one to two years.

An objective of the MLRP is expanding access to culturally competent care for diverse populations in underserved areas. 45% of survey respondents had the opportunity to utilize their foreign language skills at their MLRP practice site to facilitate interaction with

¹ The database of past MSLRP participants was generated from PCO databases containing information on obligation site address and participation time period. Names were then researched using the Google search engine in an attempt to obtain the most recent addresses of past participants.

patients or community members. Almost one-half (45%) of respondents indicated they used foreign language skills on a daily basis.

For the following aspects of program application process, over two thirds of respondents rated the following aspects of the program as 'good' or 'excellent': delivery of funds (84%), the ease of application (71%), notification of selection (78%), completion of forms (69%), and staff responsiveness (69%).

88% of respondents would recommend the Massachusetts Loan Repayment Program to other eligible applicants. 86% indicated they would participate in the program again.

Recommendations

- Establish a tracking system to verify participant contact information over time (post-obligation period) and allow for future follow-up with program participants.
- Institutionalize survey processes for participants who are within three months of completing service obligations to allow for continuous program evaluation.
- Increase awareness of the program in non-Boston and rural health professional shortage areas of Massachusetts.
- Edit the application process to simplify language and reduce the overall paper burden on applicants and staff, and expedite the application review process.
- Enhance marketing strategies to health care facilities and health professionals located in health professional shortage areas to increase awareness of the MLRP and other loan repayment programs.
- Increase outreach to academic institutions to raise awareness of financial support for careers in underserved areas and recruit applicants from the full range of eligible disciplines.
- Develop a one page information brochure describing tax filing status as a MLRP participant.

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*Since the survey was conducted, the name of the program has changed from the Massachusetts State Loan Repayment Program to the Massachusetts Loan Repayment Program for Health Professionals; the components of the program remain the same.