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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Illinois Primary Health Care Association Celebrates Success of its Pipeline Building Program

Understanding and Serving America's Underserved: An Introduction to Community Health Centers

SPRINGFIELD, Ill., July 13, 2023 – Today the Illinois Primary Health Care Association (IPHCA) is pleased to share that its virtual workforce program, in existence for two years, has produced major results for healthcare professionals in Illinois.

Since 2013, IPHCA has hosted a formal pipeline building program, “Understanding and Serving America’s Underserved: An Introduction to Community Health Centers.” The program teaches students about why patients are underserved and programs designed to provide high quality care to these patients, specifically Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs). The goal of the program is to inspire and encourage health professions students to choose a career with an FQHC.

Pivoting to a virtual, self-paced platform in 2021 allowed IPHCA to significantly expand the program’s reach by eliminating travel time and expenses for participants. In the past two years, 353 health professions students completed the program.

It is important to note that of the 2022 student participants:

- More than 40 medical, dental, nurse practitioner, physician assistant, behavioral health, and other health professions programs were represented.
- Participants were from 10 states.
- About 45% of student participants represented minority backgrounds.
- 14 National Health Service Corps (NHSC) Scholars that completed the program.
- Notably, 23 students who completed the program in a previous year completed the program a second time.

The program is divided into six tracks: Physician, Dentist, APRN/Nursing, Physician Assistant, Behavioral Health, and a general track for high school and undergraduate students. Each track included educational sessions about FQHCs and how they provide high-quality, integrated care to underserved patients, as well as sessions tailored to each specialty. This year, each track also featured interviews with current FQHC clinicians, a commonly cited request from last year’s student participants. The program concluded with a discussion of loan repayment opportunities available through NHSC and Illinois Department of Public Health, and a session on IPHCA’s Clinician Recruitment Service.

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As part of our mission to improve health outcomes throughout Illinois, IPHCA offers services and programming to strengthen the Illinois health center workforce. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Illinois health centers, as well as healthcare organizations nationwide, have experienced difficulty recruiting not only physicians, dentists, and other licensed independent practitioners, but also medical assistants, dental assistants, community health workers, and other frontline staff. Moving forward, IPHCA plans to expand the program and add tracks for these types of students to further strengthen the health center workforce pipeline.

“IPHCA has been dedicated to assisting Community Health Centers with recruitment and retention efforts for more than 20 years,” said Ashley Colwell, Vice President of Clinical Services and Workforce Development at IPHCA. “We understand that reaching students early in their educational programs has an impact their career path. We connect with hundreds of students annually through our virtual program, visits to schools, job fairs, and providing technical assistance to students that need help navigating the scholarship and loan repayment programs available. IPHCA’s workforce development team is ready to assist Community Health Centers, health professionals, and students build the health care safety-net workforce in Illinois.”

Here are just a few things that the students had to say about the program.

“I liked learning about the provider's journey in choosing to serve the underserved communities. I appreciate learning about the passion each provider has about making an impact.”

“I didn't know a lot about Community Health Centers prior to this program and I felt like I learned a lot more about serving the underserved. I enjoyed getting to hear different providers' perspectives.”

“I have heard classmates talk about FQHCs but really did not understand them entirely. I liked the module explaining what exactly an FQHC is and also how working in one can not only provide a community much needed health care but also help with repaying student loans.”

“I liked how easily accessible the program was, and how I was able to take my time going through the program. The information provided was educational and helpful to my career as a future dentist. I attended this program last year, and I am very pleased with the improvements made this year.”

About The Illinois Primary Health Care Association

IPHCA is a nonprofit trade association that serves as the voice of and champion for Illinois’ 53 community health centers, which serve more than 1.5 million patients annually across more than 400 service sites in medically underserved rural, urban, and suburban areas. [IPHCA.org](https://www.iphca.org)

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