

# Certification for Residents on Neighbor Islands in Hawai'i

ADDRESSING WORKFORCE ADEQUACY THROUGH IDENTIFYING BARRIERS TO CAREER ADVANCEMENT IN HEALTHCARE

*Prepared for the Hawai'i State Rural Health Association*

*Laura Reichhardt, Kelley Withy, Aimee Grace, Jean Isip Schneider, September 2019*

## Position Statement:

Lack of access to licensure and certification exams can adversely impact access to care by creating barriers to professional credentialing for Hawai'i's neighbor island prospective healthcare workforce. Burdens on trainees due to inaccessibility of regional certified test taking centers include costs (especially before licensure, and therefore employability) related to taking the exam, travel accommodations, and other constraints. Hawai'i lawmakers, government, and professional associations must address this barrier as part of their widespread efforts to improve rural and neighbor island healthcare adequacy.

## Background:

### *Geography and demographics:*

- Hawai'i is home to 1.4 million people and comprised of four counties and eight main islands. It is the most isolated population center on the face of the earth.<sup>i</sup>
- Approximately 72% of the state's population resided on O'ahu; 81% of residents on O'ahu live in or near the Honolulu urban area.<sup>ii</sup>
- Hawai'i has nine Critical Access Hospitals; of these, only one is on the island of O'ahu.<sup>iii</sup>
- Nearly 1 in 7 people in Hawai'i live in poverty.<sup>iv</sup>
- Over half of low-income adults lost teeth from dental disease and nearly 40% of children enrolled in MedQuest did not receive dental services, and those who are have higher rates of treatment services rather than prevention care, as compared to the nation.<sup>v</sup>
- Hawai'i has the largest multiracial population in the nation. One in four residents of Hawai'i identify as multi-racial. Of these individuals, 52% identify as Native Hawaiian and Asian or White.<sup>vi</sup>

### *Workforce demand:*

- The Hawai'i Physician Workforce Assessment Project (2018) estimates a need for 797 physician FTEs, when island geography and unmet specialty specific needs are by county are examined. The shortage by county is disproportionately higher for all counties other than Honolulu for all physicians and primary care physicians.<sup>vii</sup>

*Table 1 Demand, by numbers and percentage, of physicians and primary care physicians by County*

|                      | Honolulu | Hawai'i | Maui | Kaua'i |
|----------------------|----------|---------|------|--------|
| Physicians By County |          |         |      |        |
| Shortage             | 384      | 213     | 141  | 59     |
| Percentage           | 16.5     | 41.2    | 33.8 | 32.9   |

|                         | Honolulu | Hawai'i | Maui | Kaua'i |
|-------------------------|----------|---------|------|--------|
| Primary Care Physicians |          |         |      |        |
| Shortage                | 157      | 47      | 44   | 16     |
| Percentage              | 18       | 25      | 28.7 | 23.8   |

- The Hawai'i/Pacific Basin Area Health Education Center estimates an additional need of 396 advanced practice registered nurses, 212 physician assistants, 252 psychologists, and 772 social workers.<sup>viii</sup>
- Findings from the Healthcare Association of Hawai'i's Hawai'i Healthcare Workforce Initiative 2019 report assessed healthcare employer's demands for 76 professions, excluding physicians. Findings that Medical Assistants, Nurse Aides and Certified Nursing Assistants, Registered Nurses, Patient Service Representatives, and Phlebotomists are the top five roles in demand in Hawai'i. These professions make up 1,220 vacant positions, equating to 55% of the total healthcare vacancies identified in the report. Additionally, 30 of the 76 professions that make up 85% of all vacant positions and 83% of total positions of those entities surveyed.<sup>ix</sup>
- Hawai'i State Center for Nursing Education Capacity Survey Report for Academic Year 2017-2018 identifies that neighbor island schools graduate 23% of practical nursing, 60% of associate degree in nursing, 17% of baccalaureate degree in nursing, and 22% of doctor of nursing practice graduates.

*Health care roles requiring certified test taking centers:*

- Medical schools require that applicants take and achieve optimal scores on the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) as part of the medical school admission process.
- Certified nurse aides (CNAs), licensed practical nurses (LPNs), registered nurses (RNs), and advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs) all require certified tests in order to become eligible for nursing.
- Dental hygienists are required to have an in-person clinical exam which requires the applicant to bring test-patients.
- A review of the requirements for licensure for the HAH top 30 needed healthcare professions and others is needed to create a deeper understanding of these barriers and impacts to access to healthcare.

*Access to certified test taking centers:*

- Despite greatest demands for physicians occurring on neighbor islands of Hawai'i, just applying to medical school poses a barrier for neighbor island residents. The only Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) test center location in the state is on O'ahu.<sup>x</sup>
- The Hawai'i State Center for Nursing identified that CNAs, LPNs, RNs, and APRNs all require certified exams in order to become eligible for licensure. However, for these exams, test accessibility barriers exist for all professions.
  - CNA: CNA exam is available on O'ahu, Maui, Kaua'i and in Hilo (Personal conversation with Prometrics in Kailua, 8/7/2019). As long as there is at least one test applicant, there will be at least one testing per month on any island. However,

this information is not readily accessible on the website and is unknown by stakeholders on neighbor islands.<sup>xi</sup>

- LPN and RN: NCLEX-PN, for LPNs, and NCLEX-RN, for RNs, is only available in Honolulu.<sup>xii</sup>
- APRN: Certification exams administered by PSI exams are available on Oahu and North Hawaii Island.<sup>xiii</sup> Certified exams administered by Prometrics is only available on O‘ahu.<sup>xiv</sup>
- MCAT is only available in Honolulu.<sup>xv</sup>
- According to the Board of Dentistry<sup>xvi</sup>, the examination located in Hawaii is handled by Central Regional Dental Testing Services (CRDTS)<sup>xvii</sup>. This exam includes three examiners who independently evaluate clinical patient treatment by the applicant. This requires that the dental hygienist student identifies one or more test-patients and may require support travel for oneself as well as one or more test-patients to O‘ahu.
- A review of the certified exams required for licensure and the testing centers that offer them exams is needed to create a deeper understanding of these barriers and impacts to access to healthcare.

#### Recommendations:

1. Improve understanding of certified test taking impacts on Hawai‘i’s healthcare professions population.
  - a. Review license requirements for all 30 healthcare professions identified in the 2019 HAH workforce report, as well as physicians, to identify certified exams taking requirements.
  - b. Document the number of students residing on neighbor islands who are graduating with the top 30 healthcare professions.
  - c. Gain understanding the county distribution of certificate-requiring health professions and the related test-taking centers/organizations that provide the related certified tests.
  - d. Assess access to certified test centers which offer the certified exams, by county and island, in Hawai‘i.
  - e. Determine cost impacts on trainees from different specialities.
2. Support state policies, programs, and funding designed to improve access to career acquisition for future healthcare professionals.
3. Establish stakeholder accountability and ensure participation from rural community members, healthcare academic programs and employers.
4. Improve healthcare demand by reporting regionally in addition to statewide.
  - a. Establish baseline vacancy data by county and track over time.
5. Establish neighbor island fund to support travel and test taking costs for eligible test takers without regional test taking facilities to support workforce development on those regions.

*Upon request, this word document is available in alternative formats such as large print, an ADA compliant electronic copy or recorded audio reading.*

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- <sup>iii</sup> State of Hawai'i Department of Health Office of Primary care and Rural Health. (2019). *Medicare Rural Hospital Flexibility Program (FLEX)*. Retrieved from: [health.hawaii.gov](https://health.hawaii.gov)
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- <sup>vi</sup> Krogstad, J. M. (2015). Hawaii is home to the nation's largest share of multiracial Americans. Retrieved from Pew Research Center website: [pewresearch.org](https://www.pewresearch.org)
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- <sup>ix</sup> Healthcare Association of Hawai'i. (2019). *Hawai'i Healthcare Workforce Initiative 2019 Report*. Retrieved from: [hah.org/workforce](https://hah.org/workforce)
- <sup>x</sup> Pearsonvue. (2019). 2020 Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) Registration System Test Center Search. Retrieved from: [pearsonvue.com](https://www.pearsonvue.com)
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