

HEALTH CARE FOR CONNECTICUT'S UNDERSERVED POPULATION

April, 2010



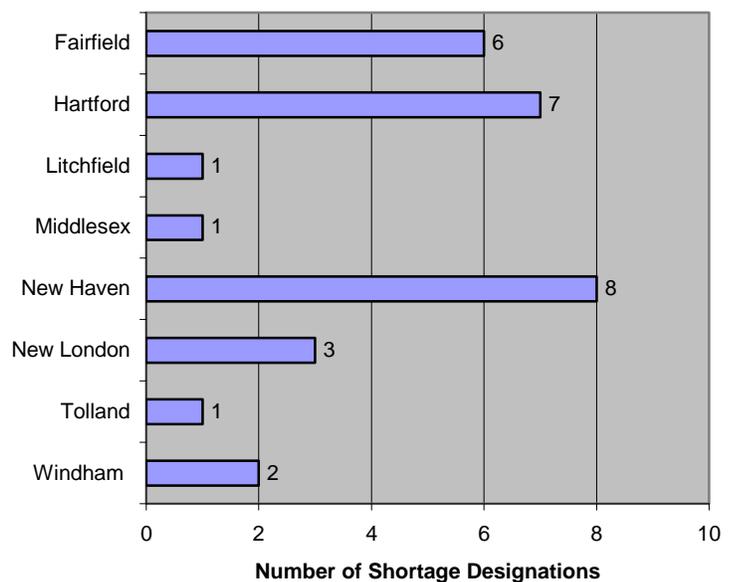
IDENTIFYING AND ASSISTING THE MEDICALLY UNDERSERVED IN CONNECTICUT

I. Identifying the Medically Underserved

The Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH) offers many health programs and services to the entire population of the state, such as screening of newborn infants for hearing impairment and certain genetic diseases, epidemiology and laboratory services that diagnose and monitor diseases in the population, and health education and nutrition programs in local communities. DPH also has programs for certain groups in Connecticut, such as Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs (CYSHCN), and people without access to regular health, dental and mental health care services.

The DPH, including its Primary Care Office, works with the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), Bureau of Health Professions, Office of Shortage Designation to identify medically underserved areas in Connecticut that may qualify for a federal designation as: a) Medically Underserved Area or Population (MUA/P), or b) Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA). HPSA's can be designated as underserved areas for primary care, dental or mental health care. Identifying needy areas in the state and then obtaining a federal designation are the first steps toward getting the necessary resources to improve health care services and access in local communities. These resources include funding for qualified medical staff, better facilities and laboratory services. More than 30 federal programs depend on the shortage designation to determine eligibility or as a funding preference. There are a number of requirements for communities wanting to qualify for a federal shortage designation such as counts of physicians and certain health providers available; the poverty level of the population; and other community health status information. See the federal website for more details at: <http://bhpr.hrsa.gov/shortage/> Federal designation as a shortage area is subject to change, based on periodic review as well as any changes in the qualifying criteria since the prior review and designation. See also Figures 1, 2 and 3.

Figure 1. Number of Medically Underserved (MUA/P) Shortage Designations by CT County, April 2010



Medically Underserved Area or Population

The Federal Register of October 15, 1976 first introduced the foundations of the Medically Underserved Area and Population (MUA/P) designations with further details elaborated later culminating in the most recent version, Public Law 99-280. The United States Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, Bureau of Primary Health Care granted Connecticut's first four Medically Underserved Area designations in 1982 including neighborhoods served by the: a) Charter Oak and b) Community Health Centers of Hartford, as well as the c) Hill and d) Fair Haven Community Health Centers of New Haven. Twenty-nine additional Connecticut towns have applied for and received this MUA/P designation recognition since that time.

MUA/P (CONTINUED)

The MUA/P designation, as well as the HPSA designation, are part of the criteria to qualify the designated area for certain federal benefits such as National Health Service Corps placements, enhanced Medicare reimbursements, Community Health Center grants and other federal or state programs. HRSA is considering updating the federal regulations related to both MUA/P and HPSA designations. Any proposed change will be published in a Federal Register announcement providing time for public comments before changes are finalized.

HEALTH PROFESSIONAL SHORTAGE AREA

Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA) designations increased by seven between 2007 and 2010. Connecticut currently has 98 designations representing all or part(s) of 32 towns and 8 of the 8 counties. The seven new HPSA designations approved include: 2 Dental, 3 Mental Health, and 2 Primary Care designations. (See Figures 2 and 3 showing CT HPSA designations.)

HPSA designations tend to be clustered in the poorer communities of the state. 2000 Census data, for example, listed Hartford with a per capita income (PCI) of \$13,428 compared with New Canaan's PCI of \$82,049. New Canaan has no shortage designations, while Hartford has 15 shortage designations.

All eight of Connecticut's counties have at least one federal shortage designation.

Figure 2. Number of Health Professional Shortage Area Designations by CT County, April, 2010

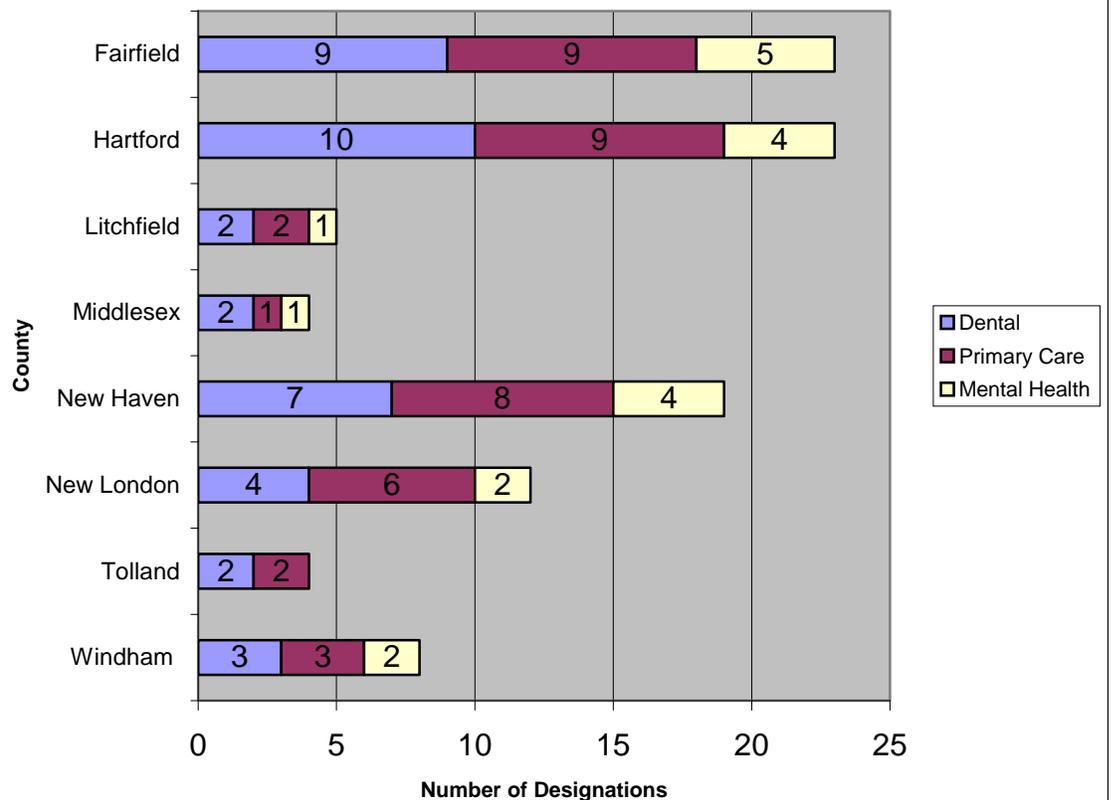
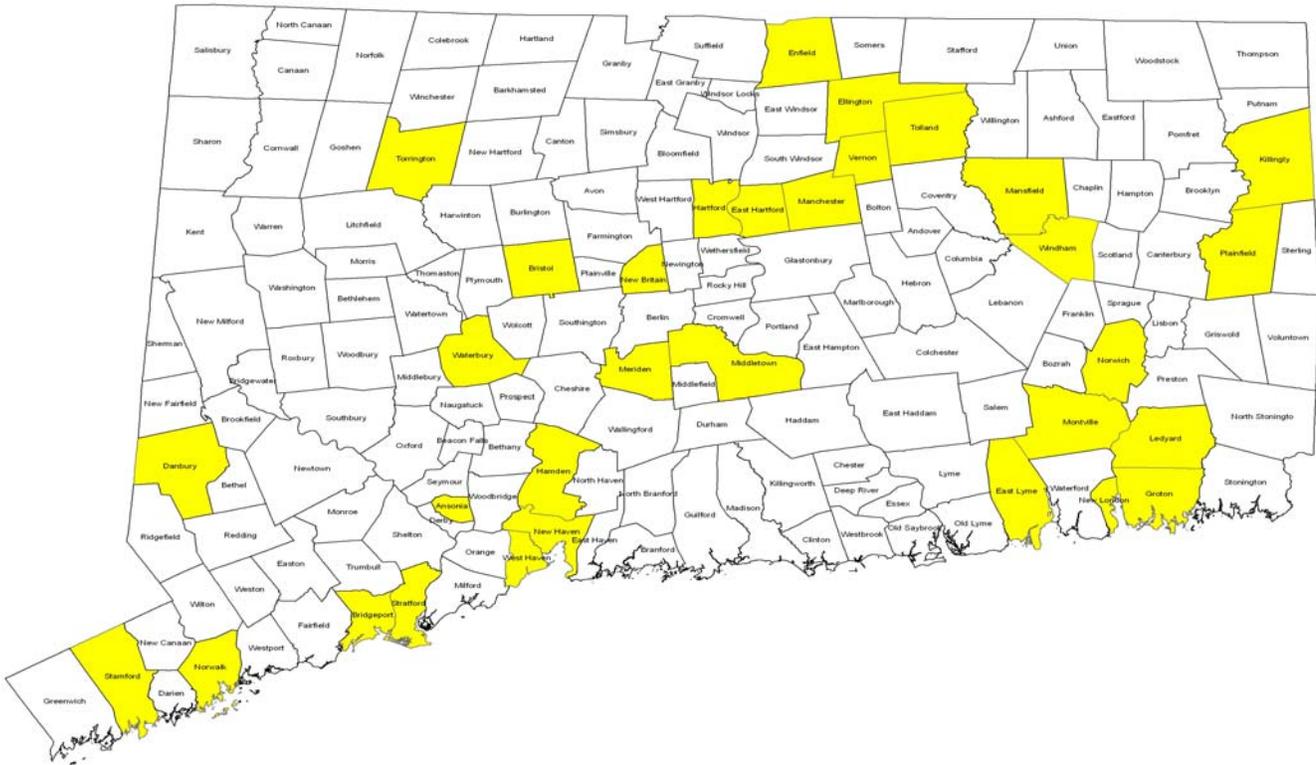


Figure 3. Health Professional Shortage Areas in CT Towns April, 2010



Note: Shaded towns have one or more HPSA designations (Primary Care, Mental Health +/-or Dental) covering all or part of the town.
 Source: <http://hpsafind.hrsa.gov/>

II. Programs Assisting the Medically Underserved

DPH helps place health professionals who are both U.S. citizens and non-citizens in areas of need in our state. U.S. professionals* work with the National Health Service Corps (NHSC) Programs. NHSC programs provide employment or financial incentives to U.S. physicians and other health care providers to work in underserved areas. For details on the National Health Service Corps refer to <http://nhsc.bhpr.hrsa.gov/about/>

Physicians who are not yet citizens may be considered for one of three federal programs to practice in designated shortage areas, namely, the National Interest Waiver (NIW) program or two different J-1 Visa programs: Conrad 30 or HHS J-1 program. To be considered for one of these programs, a physician must meet all state licensing requirements as well as federal requirements of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). Refer to the USCIS web site at <http://uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis>

*Another program, not designation-related, which assists nurses practicing in critical shortage facilities is the Nursing Education Loan Repayment Program. See <http://bhpr.hrsa.gov/nursing/loanrepay.htm> for program details including the definition of qualifying “critical shortage facilities.”

Seven of Connecticut's counties have received additional physician or other health care staff with DPH programs' assistance.

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Keeping Connecticut Healthy

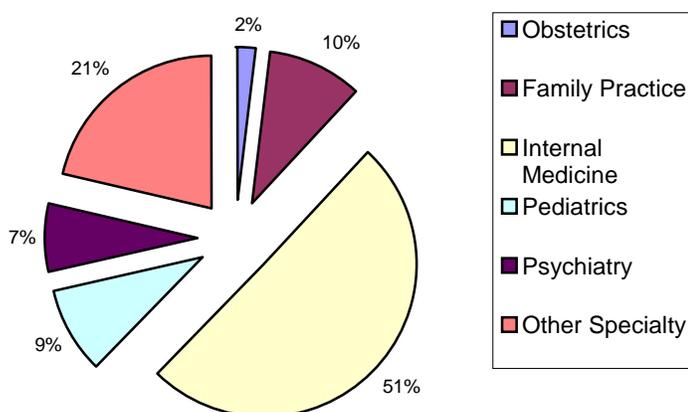
J. Robert Galvin, M.D., M.P.H.,
M.B.A., Commissioner

Programs Assisting the Medically Underserved (continued)

J-1 VISA PROGRAMS

There are two J-1 visa opportunities available for physicians who are not U.S. citizens to work in a Connecticut federally designated shortage area: Conrad 30 and the HHS J-1 program. Under the "Conrad 30" program, Section 220 of Public Law 103-416 allows a participating state each year to recommend that the United States Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) grant work visas for up to thirty (30) physicians whose license and application meet Connecticut standards. See details at: <http://www.ct.gov/dph/cwp/view.asp?a=3121&q=389500> Figure 4 shows that 79% of the physicians in CT's J-1 program practice a primary care specialty, with Internal Medicine being the largest specialty group. For more information on the HHS J-1 program see: <http://www.globalhealth.gov/exchangevisitorprogram/>

Figure 4. CT J-1 Physician Specialties, 1998-2009
(n=207)



NATIONAL INTEREST WAIVER PROGRAM

The National Interest Waiver program was authorized by the UNITED STATES CODE, Title 8, Chapter 1101, *Immigration & Nationality Act*. The term "National Interest Waiver" (NIW) is taken from the federal law, PL106-95, which provides an opportunity for physicians, who meet certain requirements, to secure visas to practice in the U.S., eventually leading to possible permanent U.S. residency. The NIW application package the physician submits to USCIS must include a letter from a state health department or federal agency attesting: a) to licensure, b) to shortage area practice location, and c) that granting this visa is "in the public interest." Interested physicians or their employers may contact the Planning Branch of DPH at (860)509-7658 to request a form to secure such a letter from DPH. Federal NIW requirements may be found at: <http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/USCIS>