



Underrepresented Students and Health Professions

All health care fields are working to improve the diversity in their professions. The goal is to have a health care workforce that is representative of our country's population. Efforts to improve diversity range from providing school children with special science lessons to summer enrichment and research opportunities for underrepresented students. This work is often referred to as improving the *medical pipeline* because it helps channel more students into healthcare fields. A diverse workforce is more responsive to cultural differences among patients and practitioners. Many patients understandably prefer seeing providers who come from similar backgrounds. Thus, improving diversity in the medical workforce can also help with improving the problems of health care disparities that we see in this country. African Americans, Latino/a, and Native Americans are especially needed in medicine where they make up only 12% of the workforce while being a much larger percent of the overall population.

Defining Underrepresented

Programs define this differently, but they often base it on the student coming from a medically underserved community. Being medically underserved is often based on socioeconomic level and/or ethnicity. Medical schools also use the concept of a disadvantaged status which they define as being from a medically underserved population and/or being on state and/or federal assistance.

Available Programs

Many health care training programs and their national organizations have plans to improve the medical pipeline. One effort is to provide summer enrichment programs. Although these are often open to all students, the original intent of the programs was to provide underrepresented students an opportunity to learn about and explore these careers.

[Summer Health Professions Education Program \(SHPEP\)](http://www.shpep.org/)

A free 6-week summer enrichment program for first and second year pre-medical, pre-dental, and other pre-health students. Highly recommended programs! <http://www.shpep.org/>

[Other summer programs](https://services.aamc.org/summerprograms/) can be found through this searchable database on the Association of American Medical Colleges website: <https://services.aamc.org/summerprograms/>

Further Information on Careers in Health

[Aspiring Doctors](http://www.aspiringdocs.org): <http://www.aspiringdocs.org>

[Explore Health Careers](http://www.explorehealthcareers.org): <http://www.explorehealthcareers.org>

[Student National Medical Association \(SNMA\)](http://www.snma.org)

Involved with supporting the interests of underrepresented medical students and those interested in health disparity issues. <http://www.snma.org>

[Student National Dental Association \(SNDA\)](http://sndanet.org)

Supports the interests of underrepresented dental students. <http://sndanet.org>