

# FAQ's: Rural Health and Substance Abuse Program

by Gil Hill

## 1. How can I get information on the Loan Repayment Program of the National Health Service Corps?

Answer: This program is open to licensed psychologists who are willing to serve in Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas (MHPSA) for a stated period of time in exchange for receiving funds to pay off their educational loans. Most (about 70%) are located in rural areas, the rest are inner city. Although the administration of this program is complex and the application process is highly competitive, it is easy to get information from the World Wide Web on it.

Go to the **National Health Service Corps** website (<http://www.bphc.hrsa.gov/nhsc>) - and scroll down to "Loan Repayment". This will lead you to basic information on the program. To find out where MHPSA's are located, go to <http://www.bphc.dhhs.gov/dsd/dsd12.htm>. This is the website of the Division of Shortage Designation, the agency that determines shortage areas. Scroll down to "Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas" and you will find the list of 600+ areas that have been designated.

A number of psychologists have been successful in getting Loan Repayment and the "APA Monitor" has done some articles about them. To read them, visit the APA website (<http://www.apa.org>) and put "Loan Repayment" in the Search Engine there.

It should be understood that some states (e.g., Virginia) also have Loan Repayment Programs that psychologists are eligible for. To determine this, contact your State Office of Primary Healthcare (normally located in the State Department of Health).

## 2. What is "RuralPSYCH"?

Answer: It is a website of the APA Practice Directorate and serves as a resource center for rural behavioral healthcare. It is available to APA members, students, and others interested in rural behavioral healthcare.

Go to <http://www.apa.org/rural/> and check it out. It contains buttons that will lead you to documents and publications as well as cross-links to other Internet rural health web sites.

**3. What organizations are the main contacts for Rural Health?**

Answer: From the standpoint of health professionals, the leading national organization is the National Rural Health Association. At the federal government level, the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Office of Rural Health Policy is the leader. Each state has a State Office of Rural Health (usually connected with the State Office of Primary Care). In addition, there is a small, but important organization titled, the National Association for Rural Mental Health.