

APPRENTICESHIP LEADS TO HIGH PASS RATES & IMPROVED CARE

Healthcare employers in rural Alaska achieve standardized training and certified healthcare workers through grant-funded apprenticeship program

Community health centers across rural Alaska struggled with a high turnover of allied health positions, resulting in a workforce shortage that was crippling to the area. They needed a way to not only retain their existing healthcare team members, but also encourage new talent to fill the industry's rising demand.

Alaska Primary Care Association (APCA) — a non-profit organization committed to promoting, expanding and optimizing access to primary care for Alaskans — took action. APCA partnered with Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development and the U.S. Department of Labor to secure a grant and launch four new healthcare Registered Apprenticeship programs, three of which take apprentices on a path toward certification through National Healthcareer Association (NHA):

- Certified Clinical Medical Assistant (CCMA)
- Certified Billing & Coding Specialist (CBCS)
- Certified Medical Administrative Assistant (CMAA)

During the past 10 years, healthcare has created more new jobs than any other sector of Alaska's economy.¹ "People realize what it means to have a national certification and how many other doors can be opened to them, not just in Alaska but throughout our country," says APCA apprenticeship training coordinator Cherise Fowler. "Having the ability to offer a standardized training that provides access to nationally recognized credentials from NHA not only raises the bar for those healthcare positions, but also supports the existing workforce and encourages more Alaskans to fill open positions."

Planning One of the First Healthcare Registered Apprenticeships in the U.S.

Prior to the government grant to fund the Registered Apprenticeship program was confirmed, the APCA team was already planning the program's structure and curriculum. As Fowler says, they were "flying and building the plane at the same time." Over the course of about eight months, plans became solidified.

Once the grant money was secured, the team spent approximately three additional months determining logistics, developing curriculum and operational plans prior to signing up the first set of apprentices. In total, about a year of work went into the planning process from initial idea to launch. Without many healthcare Registered Apprenticeships to look to as examples, the entire team was learning as they went. But once it launched, the hard work paid off and the program was met with enthusiasm.

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Cherise Fowler,
APCA Apprenticeship Training Coordinator



On-the-Job & Online Learning Leads to Certification

As word spread, the first “classes” of apprentices enrolled in the APCA program. Some individuals had been working for their participating healthcare employer for several years, while others were new hires who were excited for the opportunity to earn a certification while working and earning a living.

The apprenticeships are completed in the course of one-to-two years with program-specific requirements outlined in the chart below.

While enrolled in the program, apprentices are paid employees. Not only do they earn a wage while receiving training, but their wages increase at predefined checkpoints as they gain more experience. This helps reward them for their dedication while encouraging retention.

Toward the end of the program, as the apprentices are preparing for their certification exams, one to two prep sessions are held. Instructors answer any questions and walk the students through NHA study materials and practice exams.

Fowler says, “Giving them access to these resources helps improve test scores, and has been key to the program’s success. Partnering with NHA and using the study materials has been extremely useful and successful,” she says. “Even the students have expressed that they appreciate how it’s laid out.”

Tools implemented in the ACPA apprenticeship program include the following listed items:

- On-the-job learning
- Related technical instruction
- NHA study materials
- Test prep session(s)
- NHA practice exams
- NHA certification exam

Better Outcomes for Apprentices, Employers & Patients

Even in its infancy, the Registered Apprenticeship program has been hugely successful. To date, 52 people have attempted certification through NHA at an impressive 88% pass rate (14% above the national average during the same time period).

Achieving nationally recognized measurements of competency has elevated the quality of care in healthcare centers throughout Alaska. Fowler says several employers have expressed ongoing support, reporting a stronger and more experienced workforce and higher patient satisfaction.

The APCA reports that the apprenticeship model has helped empower people to access a better future through on-the-job learning, technical instruction and certification. It has helped healthcare organizations find and retain valuable employees who now have a standardized level of training. Ultimately, it’s helped raise the bar for healthcare in rural Alaska and improve the quality of care for patients throughout the state. And it’s only the beginning.

“I can’t say enough about the help I’ve gotten from NHA staff. The customer service is always great. It’s been a very smooth ride with NHA and I’m thankful to have them as a partner.”

Cherise Fowler,
APCA Apprenticeship Training Coordinator

Alaska Primary Care Association Apprenticeship Requirements

CERTIFICATION	PROGRAM LENGTH	ON-THE-JOB LEARNING	ONLINE COURSE WORK
CCMA	2 years	4,000 hours	288 hours
CBCS	1 year	2,500 hours	164 hours
CMAA	1 year	2,000 hours	170 hours



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