

CONNECTICUT YOUTH HEALTH SERVICE CORPS

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Connecticut Primary Care Association (CPCA)
National Health Service Corps (NHSC)

The Connecticut Youth Health Service Corps (CTYHSC) is a program designed to recruit high school students into a health care career. In 2004, the CTYHSC was officially established by the Connecticut AHEC Program with partial funding generously provided by the Connecticut State Department of Public Health. Other collaborators include the Connecticut Primary Care Association, who helps with volunteer placement sites, and the National Health Service Corps, who provides student award recognition. Students receive training and are placed as volunteers at sites that offer health care services to vulnerable populations. While serving as volunteers, students are exposed to the world of health care where they work with health care professionals who serve as role models and mentors. In Connecticut, the problem of workforce shortages and under-representation of racial and ethnic minorities in the health professions must be addressed. Thus, the CTYHSC is working to mobilize the next generation of health care practitioners, while still in high school, to contribute in a meaningful way to the delivery of health care in their community. Another goal of the CTYHSC is to help disadvantaged students avoid many of the pitfalls that prevent youth from reaching their full potential including poor school achievement, teen pregnancy, drug use, etc. This program allows students to make a difference in their community while also making a difference in their own life's trajectory. Currently, over 20 high schools and 60 volunteer sites are participating throughout Connecticut. The high schools represent urban, suburban, and rural areas in Connecticut, while the volunteer sites include community health centers, dental clinics, homeless shelters, and long-term care facilities.

The program uses a three tiered structure to organize training modules and hours of volunteer service as follows:

	Training Modules	Hours of Volunteer Service
Tier 1	Module 1: Homelessness 101 Module 2: Confidentiality and Privacy Module 3: Applied Health/Universal Precautions	10 hours
Tier 2	Module 4: Cultural Competency Module 5: CPR Certification Module 6: Health Education and Disease Prevention	25 hours (cumulative)
Tier 3	Module 7: Observation and Data Collection	50 hours (cumulative)

	Module 8: Emergency Preparedness Module 9: Peer Education	
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Since the inception of the program in September 2004, a nine-module curriculum and associated evaluations have been developed. Student mastery of curriculum content is assessed through pre and post tests and student volunteer placement is assessed by the student, parent and volunteer site coordinator. Student training completion, volunteer service hours, high school graduation date, and post secondary degree(s) will be tracked via a web-based database. Within two to four years the database will indicate if CTYHSC students enter health professions at a greater rate than comparable students. To date, over 110 diverse students have been trained as volunteers achieving a 40% improvement rate in pre and post curriculum evaluations. In addition, over 150 hours of volunteer service have been completed at 60 volunteer sites across Connecticut.

Difficulties encountered in the program include transportation, changes in student home address and phone number, and completion of parental permission and medical forms. In response to these difficulties training programs are being held at local high schools rather than regional training centers and students are matched with volunteer sites within walking distance to their home. Students whose contact information has changed are accessed via school counselors. Lastly, parental permission forms will be completed at the conclusion of the Tier 1 trainings. Since the pilot site trainings in December there has been an "unexpected" and overwhelming community response to the program. Schools, community agencies, parents, and students have indicated that the CTYHSC fills a need for a structured volunteer program that provides training, evaluation, and follow up. As of March 2005, six months into the implementation of the program, the CTYHSC has trained 116 student volunteers, far surpassing the year one goal of training 60 students.

The State of Connecticut Department of Public Health benefits from the program by mobilizing a large number of youth to contribute to the delivery of health care to vulnerable populations in Connecticut. In addition, the youth learn about the public health structure in Connecticut and become better health care consumers and advocates, as well as gaining valuable health related skills and knowledge (Universal Precautions and CPR). The University of Connecticut School of Medicine and other health professions schools benefit through the recruitment of students from diverse background into their post secondary health professions training programs.

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