

RCW 28B.115.010 Legislative findings—Intent. The legislature finds that changes in demographics, the delivery of health care services, and an escalation in the cost of educating health professionals has resulted in shortages of health professionals. A poor distribution of health care professionals has resulted in a surplus of some professionals in some areas of the state and a shortage of others in other parts of the state, such as in the more rural areas and in behavioral health services. The high cost of health professional education requires that health care practitioners command higher incomes to repay the financial obligations incurred to obtain the required training. Health professional shortage areas are often areas that have troubled economies and lower per capita incomes. These areas often require more services because the health care needs are greater due to poverty or because the areas are difficult to service due to geographic circumstances. The salary potentials for shortage areas are often not as favorable when compared to nonshortage areas and practitioners are unable to serve. The legislature further finds that encouraging health professionals to serve in shortage areas is essential to assure continued access to health care for persons living in these parts of the state.

The legislature also finds that one in five adults in the United States experiences mental illness in any given year, but only forty-one percent of adults with a mental health condition received mental health services in 2016, according to the national institute of mental health. The *children's mental health work group found that in 2013, only forty percent of children on medicaid with mental health treatment needs were receiving services. Individuals seeking behavioral health services may have trouble receiving the help they need from health care professionals because behavioral health services are limited due to workforce shortages of behavioral health providers. The legislature further finds that encouraging more health care professionals to practice behavioral health in areas with limited services would benefit the state by creating greater access to behavioral health services and by having more health care professionals experienced in providing behavioral health services.

Therefore, the legislature intends to establish the Washington health corps to encourage more health care professionals to work in underserved areas by providing loan repayment and conditional scholarships in return for completing a service commitment. [2019 c 302 § 1; 1989 1st ex.s. c 9 § 716. Formerly RCW 18.150.010.]

***Reviser's note:** The "children's mental health work group" was renamed the "children and youth behavioral health work group" by 2020 c 130 § 1.