

CONNECTING PIPELINES TO PATHWAYS FOR HEALTH EQUITY

Innovative Partnerships to Increase Diversity in Pre-Health Pathway Programs and MD Programs

THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN SCHOOL OF MEDICINE AND PUBLIC HEALTH

KEY POINTS

The University of Wisconsin – Madison School of Medicine and Public Health (UWSMPH) is working to develop pathways to health equity and change the face of healthcare through innovative partnerships that increase diversity in Pre-Health Pathway Programs and MD Programs at UWSMPH.

- ✓ UWSMPH Pathway Programs effectively leverage on- and off-campus relationships and resources for successful career preparation of pre-health students from groups historically underrepresented in medicine.
- ✓ Strategic partnerships and synergistic efforts to better engage students and alumni from groups historically underrepresented in medicine have been established to enhance our pathway programs.
- ✓ Programs utilize innovative initiatives and programming that enhance all pre-health students' awareness of inequities in healthcare and their role in addressing health equity issues.
- ✓ Initiatives, programming, and strategies have been successful in increasing diversity within the health professions and have enhanced student success. Partnerships achieve greater equity in access to health professions among underrepresented students of color and greater equity in healthcare.

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

Addressing the statewide shortage of physicians who practice in rural and urban underserved areas, and increasing the number of students from historically underrepresented and underserved backgrounds in the healthcare professions

Substantial inequities exist in health outcomes within the U.S. healthcare system and in communities, including in Wisconsin where there is a statewide shortage of physicians who practice in rural and urban underserved areas. The number of students from backgrounds historically underrepresented



and underserved in healthcare who are entering health professions was not well-aligned with state demographics or needs.

THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN SCHOOL OF MEDICINE AND PUBLIC HEALTH (UWSMPH) APPROACH

UWSMPH has a deep and profound commitment to health equity and recognizes increasing diversity as a valuable means for eliminating health disparities in Wisconsin and beyond. UWSMPH strives to select and enroll a diverse class of students in its MD program committed to health equity.

The UWSMPH Office of MD Admissions houses staff who provide direction and oversight of the school's signature pre-health/pre-medicine pathway programs: the Rural and Urban Scholars in Community Health (RUSCH) and the Health Professions Shadowing Program (HPSP). These programs are key components to increasing diversity in UWSMPH's MD program and other health professional degree programs, developing future healthcare providers to mitigate health disparities.

Two Signature Pathway Programs Established

UWSMPH has effectively designed and leveraged pathway programs as a crucial component to increasing diversity in medical school and to address health equity. Two signature pathway programs are designed to impact both issues: the Rural and Urban Scholars in Community Health (RUSCH) program and the Health Professions Shadowing Program (HPSP).

For both programs, eligible participants are first-generation college students from medically underserved areas, or from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. Emphasis is placed on admitting students underrepresented in medicine. All scholars are encouraged to apply to UWSMPH and receive assistance with preparing their medical school applications.

Rural and Urban Scholars in Community Health (RUSCH)

RUSCH is a two-year pathway program for pre-health college students who are interested in practicing medicine in Wisconsin's rural or urban health profession shortage areas. It is also a robust pathway program for UWSMPH's rural and urban



medical education tracks. RUSCH scholars receive a stipend while participating in research and community health summer internships, along with diverse enrichment activities designed to develop the knowledge, skills, and competencies to prepare them for admission to UWSMPH.

Enrichment sessions are offered during the summer and the academic year around public health, health equity, social justice in medicine, MD admissions advising, and careers in medicine, in addition to clinical shadowing experiences and networking with UWSMPH students.

Strategic partnerships have been established with UW-Madison's Diversity Division, three state partner campuses that serve both rural and urban areas of Wisconsin, a historically black college/university (HBCU), and UWSMPH's Native American Center for Health Professions to attract eligible participants. Partnerships are intentionally established with pre-health advisors and multicultural student offices and have led to impactful connections that assist in the recruitment of students from target groups.

Health Professions Shadowing Program

HPSP is a unique collaboration between our medical school (Academic Health Center) and UW-Madison's Center for Pre-Health Advising (CPHA). HPSP is a two-week summer program for UW-Madison students that aims to increase knowledge of health professions and healthcare provider roles. Students complete approximately 30 hours of clinical shadowing in a variety of healthcare fields and engage in networking, professional development, and community building activities.

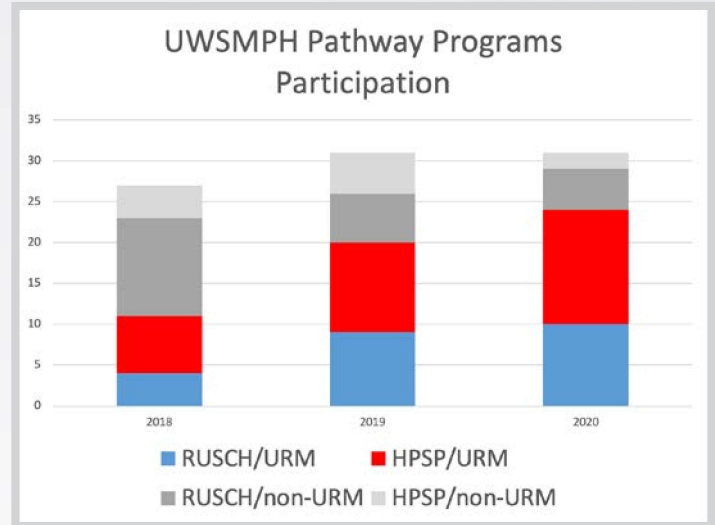
Pathway Programs Synergy, Oversight, and Funding

Both programs enhance peer networks to support persistence of pre-health students, foster academic success and professional growth, and initiate positive mentoring relationships with providers and professional program representatives. HPSP scholars who are interested in medicine are encouraged to enter RUSCH upon completion of HPSP. Participants from both programs who successfully complete their pre-health experience and apply to UWSMPH's MD Program receive a guaranteed interview if they meet the minimum metrics for admission.

The recent establishment of a full-time Director of Pathway Programs and Recruitment position in 2018 within the MD Admissions Office has been central to the success of these initiatives by providing leadership in fostering partnerships between our medical school and partner campuses and programs. The Director provides oversight to the pathway programs and has ensured that they are strategically designed to meet the needs of the target populations—which includes advising through the medical school admissions process that is intentional, culturally specific, inclusive, and offers free MCAT prep opportunities. These strategies build success and reduce barriers for pre-health students from underrepresented backgrounds, and have been successful in assisting them in their pursuit of a career in medicine.

UWSMPH's decision to firmly establish pathway programs within the MD Admissions Office enhances efforts to increase diversity within its applicant pool. The Director serves as an ad hoc member of the Medical School Admissions Committee and the scholarship committee. UWSMPH allocated additional funding for these efforts, thus solidifying an official partnership between UWSMPH's MD Admissions Office and UW-Madison's Center for Pre-Health Advising (CPHA) to offer joint programming and additional staff to be hired to form a Pathway Programs Team within the Office of MD Admissions.

The development of a successful partnership between CPHA and UWSMPH's MD Admissions Office has resulted in a three-tier Pre-Health Pathway Program consisting of:



- **HPSP** - one summer in a two-week clinical shadowing program;
- **RUSCH I** - one summer in an eight-week community/public health internship; and
- **RUSCH II** - one summer in an eight-week research internship.

Challenges in Implementing Programs

We encountered challenges finding a significant number of underrepresented minority (URM) students at our state partner campuses who were ready to apply to RUSCH. To address that, we revised our application process and strategically aligned our connections at partner campuses, including working with student organizations and UW-Madison's CPHA and Diversity Division, to begin recruitment of qualified URM students earlier in their college careers. The HPSP program has been challenged in being able to serve all of the URM students who express an interest due to limited capacity. Staff work to connect these students with resources and advising.

RESULTS/OUTCOMES

- Enhancing partnerships with the three existing UW System campuses (which serve students from rural and urban areas), UWSMPH's Native American Center for Health Professions (NACHP), and one HBCU has enhanced the success of the pathway programs. Adding a partnership with the UW-Madison's Division of Diversity and Educational Achievement (DDEEA) further contributed to this success. These changes increased the percentage of program participants from URM backgrounds from 25 percent to 67 percent during a two-year period (2018-2020).
- There are currently eight Pathway Scholars/alumni from URM backgrounds enrolled in UWSMPH's MD Program. In the current application cycle, eight Pathway Scholars/alumni from URM backgrounds have applied to UW SMPH's MD Program—all eight have been accepted.
- We anticipate that the number of URM students participating in the Pathway Programs will remain steady or increase.
- We anticipate that the number of scholars from URM backgrounds who complete the programs and apply, are accepted, and matriculate into UWSMPH's MD Program will continue to increase—thus assisting the Office of MD Admissions (UWSMPH's) goal of increasing diversity in the MD classes. The expected result will be an increase in the diversity of Wisconsin physicians, reducing healthcare disparities in underserved rural and urban areas.

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND RELATED MATERIALS ABOUT THE UWSMPH PATHWAYS PROGRAMS:

- <https://med.wisc.edu/education/rusch/>
- <https://prehealth.wisc.edu/health-professions-shadowing-program/>

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