



# COUNTY OF YOLO

Office of the County Administrator

*Sharon Jensen*  
County Administrator

Beth Gabor  
Public Information Officer

625 Court Street, Room 202 • Woodland, CA 95695  
(530) 666-8150 • FAX (530) 668-4029  
[www.yolocounty.org](http://www.yolocounty.org)

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Contact: Beth Gabor, Public Information Officer  
(530) 666-8042 [w] • (530) 219-8464 [c]

## **New Public Health Nursing Scholarship Program**

(Woodland, CA) – Today the Yolo County Board of Supervisors approved a public health nursing scholarship program, and authorized the Health Officer to begin soliciting applications in an effort to address Yolo County's public health nursing shortage.

“Our vote today signals this Board's commitment to a healthier future”, said Yolo County Board of Supervisors Chair Mariko Yamada. “At a time when changing demographics will place even higher demands on our public health nursing workforce, we want to do all we can to recruit, support and retain those who answer the call to public service.”

The new program will provide \$2,500 scholarships per semester/quarter to individuals interested in public health nursing and currently in a nursing baccalaureate degree program, or to registered nurses considering a bachelor-level nursing degree and working in the field of public health. The funds, not to exceed \$10,000 in any given fiscal year, will pay for up to two scholarships per year and are to be used for tuition and books as long as the recipient is continuously enrolled full-time in an approved baccalaureate nursing program. Recipients can receive the scholarship for up to two years and in exchange agree to work as a public health nurses for the Yolo County Health Department for a minimum of one year, starting no later than a year after receiving their bachelor's degree. If recipients receive the scholarship for two years, they work for the department for two years.

Nursing shortages have occurred in the past, but the magnitude of the current shortage is the largest in U.S. history. In 1980, there were 219 public health workers per 100,000 in population. That number has dropped to 158/100,000 in 2000. Public health nurses had the largest decrease and a recent study documents that they will continue to be the most affected. California ranks 49th out of 50 states in the number of registered nurses per 100,000 in population.

There are numerous factors contributing to the shortage: the overall decrease in the number of nurses with baccalaureate or higher degrees; salary comparisons with the health care industry; shortages of professors eligible to teach nursing; and upcoming retirement rates of public health nurses that are estimated at up to 45% over the next five years. Yolo County has been proactive in looking at these issues and has already taken steps to improve our public health nurse staffing. Salaries have been increased to within other counties in the region and the health department serves as a preceptor site for local nursing students to get public health experience.

“Health departments are being asked to do more and be prepared for health emergencies and infectious disease outbreaks,” noted Dr. Bette Hinton, Yolo County Health Officer/Director. “Public health nurses are critical staff in our ability to respond. By being proactive now in recruiting public health nurses through a scholarship program, we will be better prepared for emergencies.”

For more information, contact Alida Hrivnak, Yolo County Director of Nursing at (530) 666-8645.

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