

Contact: Alida Hrivnak, Director of Nursing
Phone: (530) 666-8645.

Woodland, Ca—Today the Yolo County Board of Supervisors took action to address the Public Health Nursing Shortage for Yolo County. They approved the County of Yolo Public Health Nursing Scholarship Program, and authorized the Health Officer to begin soliciting applications.

“This is a big step forward in ensuring a long-term and competent Public Health Nurse workforce,” states Supervisor Mariko Yamada. “We want to encourage community residents to consider public health nursing as a profession and to work locally.”

The program will provide scholarships to individuals interested in public health nursing who are currently in a baccalaureate degree program in nursing, or who are currently registered nurses who want to enhance their careers by getting a bachelor level nursing degree and work in the field of public health.

The funds will pay for up to two scholarships per year. The funds 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.

In exchange for the scholarship, the recipient agrees to work as a Public Health Nurse for the Yolo County Health Department for a minimum of one year, starting no later than one year after receiving their bachelor’s degree. If the recipient receives the scholarship for two years, the recipient would work for the Department for two years.

Nursing shortages have occurred in the past, but the magnitude of this shortage is the largest in U.S. history. In 1980, there were 219 Public Health Workers per 100,000 population. That has dropped to 158/100,000 in 2000. Public Health Nurses had the largest decrease. California ranks number 49 out of 50 states in the number of registered nurses per 100,000 in population. A recent study documents that in the nursing shortage, Public Health Nurses will continue to be the most affected.

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, shortage 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 the issue, 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 to be prepared for health emergencies, and infectious disease outbreaks,” states 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 about the scholarships, contact Alida Hrivnak, Director of Nursing at (530) 666-8645.