



## get on the medical provider path

### Is this the job for me?

Take this quick quiz to find out if community health aide is a good direction for you:

- 1 Do you have a desire to help people?  
 YES  NO
- 2 Want to live in a remote area, and maybe travel for your work?  
 YES  NO
- 3 Are you willing to respond to emergencies anytime?  
 YES  NO
- 4 Are you an independent worker and a good communicator?  
 YES  NO
- 5 Do you like to problem solve?  
 YES  NO
- 6 Do you enjoy math and science?  
 YES  NO
- 7 Want to get into a career in two years or less?  
 YES  NO

If you answered yes to several of these questions, you may be on the right track!

### What's it all about?

Community health aides (CHAs), who exist only in Alaska, are one of the most important health care providers in the state's rural areas. CHAs, who are employed by tribal health organizations and work under the supervision of a referral physician, provide primary health care in Alaska's remote villages. Their training leads to becoming a community health practitioner (CHP).

As CHAs live and work in remote areas, they rely on telephone, e-mail and fax to communicate with their referral physicians. CHAs use the "Alaska Community Health Aide/Practitioner Manual" to guide them in providing care to a wide variety of patients, including elders, pregnant women, infants, children, accident victims, and mental health and chronic disease patients.

### What do CHAs do?

CHAs complete a variety of tasks, including:

- Maintain regular clinic hours and provide 24-hour emergency care.
- Interview and examine patients to identify health problems.
- Consult with referring physician.
- Order or run diagnostic tests.
- Treat or refer patients seeking care.
- Keep detailed patient records.
- Counsel patients and family members.

- Perform routine procedures, such as injections and stitches.
- Provide preventive health care.
- Administer dental prevention program.
- Provide well-child and prenatal care.
- Monitor care of the chronically ill.
- Maintain clinic records, supplies and pharmacy.
- Arrange patient travel to regional health care centers.
- Assist patients with filling out forms.
- Collaborate with social workers, teachers and others on health-related issues.
- Supervise other staff.
- Coordinate visits for itinerant health professionals, such as physicians and dentists.
- Take required continuing education classes.

### How much money can I make?

Hourly wages range from \$9.20 for a new CHA to \$39.95 for an experienced practitioner.

### How do I become a CHA? How long does it take?

To become a CHA, you must:

- Have math and English skills at or beyond the sixth grade level.
- Complete a series of basic training sessions and a clinical preceptorship.
- Provide proof of current emergency trauma technician or emergency medical technician training/certification.
- Complete a period of supervised clinical training.
- Usually be a local resident who intends to remain in the village.
- Be employed by a tribal health organization that operates a CHA program.

The basic CHA training series, which consists of 15 weeks divided into four sessions, typically takes about 14 months to complete. CHAs are paid a salary during their training, which is offered at four regional centers across the state. CHAs may complete additional clinical requirements and take an exam to become a CHP. CHAs and CHPs may also work toward an associate of applied science degree.

Learn more about CHA and CHP training programs in Alaska by reviewing the “training providers” section later in this publication.

### Attention high school students!

If you think you might want to become a CHA or CHP, the time to start planning is now. In general, you should take four years of English, three years of math, three years of social studies, two years of science and possibly two years of a second language. You should also consider taking college preparatory or advanced placement (AP) courses. Other recommended classes and electives include:

- Biology
- Anatomy and physiology
- Computer applications
- Nutrition
- Foreign language
- Introduction to health care
- Safety and first aid

You should also discuss your plans with a teacher, counselor and parents, and check to see what work-based learning opportunities, such as field trips, job shadowing and internships, are available in your community.

### Are there jobs available?

According to a recent vacancy study, there is a high demand for CHAs and CHPs, and there are many opportunities for those just entering the field. For example, of the approximately 100 current job openings, 88 are open to new graduates.

### Where are the jobs?

CHAs generally work in the village where they live, although some CHAs may travel to a number of villages each year. CHAs are usually selected by the village council, and are employed by their tribal council or tribal health organization.

### What else is on this pathway?

Want to learn about other possible opportunities on the medical provider career pathway? Be sure to read about physician assistant and family physician – other health care “hot jobs” in Alaska!

