

Alaska WWAMI Medical Education 2018

Alaska's Medical School



AK WWAMI Facts

- Alaska needs 60+ new physicians/yr to meet demand. AK WWAMI contributes 14+ physicians/yr to meet that need.
- More than 500 Alaska residents have earned medical degrees through WWAMI (97% completion rate).
- The average return rate of AK students graduating from WWAMI is 60%; this number increases to over 70% return-on-investment, when including non-AK WWAMI graduates practicing in the state.
- Over 200 AK Physicians have clinical faculty appointments at UW and teach in WWAMI.
- It takes a minimum of 7 years from entry to practice to become a physician (4 years in medical school, 3 years in residency).
- Alaska has a shortage of physicians: primary care, psychiatry, emergency medicine
- AK WWAMI graduates choose primary care residencies (61%)
- More than 70% of state funds committed each year to the WWAMI program are spent in Alaska
- AK's aging population and rural/frontier nature combine to produce a large medically underserved population.

Program Summary

In 1971, Alaska entered into a cooperative program with the University of Washington School of Medicine (UWSOM) and the states of Montana, Idaho and Wyoming subsequently joined, resulting in "WWAMI", the acronym for the partner states. WWAMI's goal is to make medical education accessible to students in northwestern states that do not have independent medical schools, and to help meet physician workforce needs for each of the states.

Alaska WWAMI Program Goals:

- Access to public medical education for Alaska residents (UWSOM- top 10 US medical school)
- Alaska physician workforce: encourage graduates to choose careers in primary care medicine and locate their practices in underserved or rural areas in Alaska
- Support and encourage talented students, especially rural and minority students, to enter the field of medicine

New Curriculum and new opportunity for Alaska

AK WWAMI is in the third year of the new Foundations Phase curriculum, where students now spend the equivalent of the 1st and 2nd year of medical school at UAA. Alaska WWAMI students no longer relocate to Seattle for classes. Clinical training (years 3 and 4) can be completed in Alaska, and across the WWAMI region. Both Anchorage and Juneau offer the full complement of third-year clinical training, and single-specialty clinical rotations for both the third and fourth years are available across Alaska (245 student rotations in 2017-open to all WWAMI students). This provision of clinical training in Alaska engages over 200 Alaska physicians in helping educate the next generation and helps recruit WWAMI students to Alaska communities.

State Support

The state of Alaska provides a subsidy for each student enrolled in the program. For FY17 the state provided \$3.0 M to support 60 students in years 2-4 of the WWAMI program at an average subsidy per student of \$50,000 annually, while students pay an additional \$35,000 in tuition per year. Also, the University of Alaska supports the Foundations Phase program at UAA. Collectively, over 70% of state funds committed each year to the WWAMI program is spent in Alaska, supporting classroom teaching at UAA and clinical teaching of WWAMI students in 45 clerkships located throughout the state.

AK WWAMI students who do not return to AK to practice must 'payback' the state's subsidy, further reducing the cost of the program to the State. Students not returning currently pay \$75,000 back to the State.

Alaska Physician Workforce

Alaska has a shortage of physicians, especially primary care doctors. The majority of Alaska WWAMI students choose to practice in primary care (61%). The average return rate of AK students graduating from WWAMI is 60%; this number increases to 70% return-on-investment, when including non-AK WWAMI graduates practicing in the state.

The partnership between the University of Washington School of Medicine and Alaska continues to be a productive and cost-effective approach for meeting the needs of the physician workforce in Alaska.



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