



Alaska WWAMI Medical Education 2021

Alaska's Medical School



Program Summary

Fifty years ago, Alaska entered into a cooperative program with the University of Washington School of Medicine (UWSOM) and the states of Washington, Montana, Idaho and Wyoming subsequently joined, resulting in “WWAMI”, the acronym for the partner states. WWAMI has been successful in making medical education at one of the top 10 universities in the country accessible to 20 students per year in Alaska, and plays a primary role in meeting the physician workforce needs for the State.

About Medical Education

- Every state in our country funds medical education
 - Publicly funded medical schools through their respective University systems
 - Through cooperative compacts such as WWAMI
- It takes a *minimum* of 7 years from entry to medical school to become a physician (4 years in medical school, 3 years in residency).

More About Alaska WWAMI

- WWAMI provides Alaska residents access to publicly supported medical education
 - Publicly funded schools give significant preference to their own state residents
 - UWSOM receives more than 6,000 out of state applications per year and admits 0.3% of those out of state applicants
 - 1 in 300 chance of Alaska student acceptance to UW School of Medicine
- WWAMI guarantees 20 Alaska students admission with in-state tuition
 - WWAMI is Alaska's medical School
 - 1 in 4 chance of acceptance to UW School of Medicine through WWAMI
- Alaska WWAMI students may complete their entire medical education in Alaska with exception of two clinical rotations at the University of Washington in Seattle
 - Alaska WWAMI students now spend the equivalent of the 1st and 2nd year of medical school at University of Alaska Anchorage, taught by over 30 MD and PhD faculty.
 - Clinical training (3rd and 4th years) can be completed in Alaska. Alaska offered 60 clerkships with 265 available student rotations in 2020-2021 (open to all WWAMI students) engaging over 220 physicians in the state as WWAMI faculty.

State Report

The state of Alaska, as part of partnership with UWSOM to support public medical education, provides a subsidy for each student enrolled in the program.

- For FY21 the state provided a little over \$3.1 M to support 60 students in years 2-4 of the WWAMI program.
- The students pay an additional \$40,000+ in tuition per year.
- The University of Alaska supports the Foundations Phase program at UAA.
- Collectively, over 93% of state funds committed each year to the WWAMI program are spent in Alaska.

- Alaska WWAMI students who do not return to Alaska to practice must ‘payback’ the state’s subsidy, further reducing the cost of the program to the State.
 - Students not returning currently pay ~\$70,000 back to the State.

Alaska Workforce Physician Needs

- Alaska has a shortage of physicians, especially primary care, psychiatry and emergency medicine doctors.
- WWAMI encourages graduates to choose careers in primary care medicine and locate their practices in underserved or rural areas in Alaska.
- Recruitment and retention
 - It is expensive (\$250,000 to \$1 million) to recruit physicians to Alaska and difficult to retain them
 - Alaska competes with entire nation for physicians and there is a shortage of primary care physicians across the country
- Alaska needs 60+ new physicians/year to meet demand.
 - Alaska WWAMI contributes 14+ physicians annually to meet that need.
- Alaska residents are more likely to return to Alaska to practice than non-residents.
- The majority of Alaska WWAMI students (over 60%) choose to practice in the areas most needed in AK (Primary care, emergency medicine and psychiatry)

Alaska WWAMI’s Strong Return on Investment

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.

- More than 500 Alaska residents have earned medical degrees through WWAMI (97% completion rate).
- The average return rate of Alaska WWAMI students is 60%
 - 70% return-on-investment, when including non-Alaska WWAMI graduates practicing in the state.
 - Approximately 12% of Alaska’s Licensed Physicians are WWAMI Graduates
 - Largest contributing medical school to the Alaska Workforce
- Alaska WWAMI Creates jobs
 - Faculty and staff who educate 80 medical students per year
 - New physicians contribute to the growth of Alaska’s healthcare industry
 - Economic impact of one primary care physician estimated at over \$1 million per year

WWAMI in Rural Communities

- Between 2011-2021, on average, 25% of students admitted to the Alaska WWAMI Program were originally from rural communities.
- 25% of Alaska WWAMI Graduates who have returned to Alaska practice in rural communities.
 - Currently over 70 known WWAMI graduates practicing in rural communities.

*RURAL DEFINED AS EITHER OFF THE ROAD SYSTEM OR NOT ANCHORAGE, EAGLE RIVER, WASILLA, PALMER OR FAIRBANKS