

## **Helping Them Get Started: Funding Entry-Level Allied Health Professions Exam Fees for Pre-Health Students**

**Project Abstract:** The Office of Pre-Health Advising is a newly established/relocated office in the College of Arts and Sciences. We work with students and alumni interested in a variety of health professions, most of which are known for being highly selective. Gaining direct patient experience is often an area that many health professions schools and programs seek out in their applicants, some of whom even require such experience. Gaining these experiences can be challenging, with many requiring costly training and exam fees. Our project seeks to identify underrepresented students and/or students in financial need who have completed training for an entry-level allied health job, but need assistance covering the cost of their exam. Such support can help students get started in an entry-level job in healthcare which can increase their chances of being accepted by a professional school, such as medical school.

### ***Project Summary and Details:***

The Office of Pre-Health Advising (OPHA) serves all CU Boulder degree-seeking undergraduate students, regardless of major, and recent undergraduate alumni who intend to enroll in a variety of health professional schools including dentistry, medicine, nursing, physical therapy, pharmacy, physician assistant, and veterinary medicine. OPHA provides counsel on how to prepare to become a strong applicant for these schools, and helps students navigate the application process. In order to be a competitive applicant, students need to maintain high GPAs, gain direct patient experience through work or volunteering, study intensively for entrance exams, and showcase leadership.

Gaining direct patient experience through work or volunteering can be particularly challenging for full-time students, but many manage to accomplish this through volunteer roles or work in entry-level positions. Working in these types of positions is highly valued by healthcare professional schools, with some of them even requiring such work. For example, to become a Physician Assistant, applicants must obtain, on average, 2,000 hours of paid healthcare-relevant experiences. The average hours of experience with patients in last year's admitted students to CU Anschutz' PA program was 2,010 hours (Admissions Statistics, 2022). The PA Program at Red Rocks Community College sheds light on how high these experience hours can go with their last year's average being that of 5,450 hours of paid healthcare-relevant experience at the time of application submittal (RRCC FAQ, 2022). Both programs of which, CU Boulder sends students to every year. Medical schools, while not requiring specific hours, also value the experiences of students working directly with patients. In a 2002 survey of 67 medical schools across the United States and Canada, 85.7% of schools responded more favorably to EMT and paramedic experience than those without experience, when reviewing applicants (Pipas et al., 2002).

Many training programs that the Office of Pre-Health Advising refers students to can be done through community colleges where students can use financial aid, take advantage of the College Opportunity Fund (COF), a state stipend for students who are eligible to lower the tuition bill of courses, or take advantage of the short-term Care Forward Colorado program that provides tuition coverage for allied health fields for eligible students. But taking the courses needed for these fields is only the first step.

Many of these programs require basic CPR and First-Aid certification or, after a student has completed all their courses, to become, say, a Certified Nursing Assistant, they need to take an exam to be a state-certified practitioner and work in the field they just spent tuition on studying. Here are a few examples of the cost of trainings, exams, certifications, or programs:

<b>Training or Exam</b>	<b>Cost of Training or Exam</b>	<b>Notes:</b>
Red Cross CPR and First Aid Training Offered by CU Boulder	\$85 for members at the Rec Center	Basic, fundamental training required by a majority of roles where someone would work with patients, from Personal Care Assistant to EMTs to volunteer roles in hospitals
Certified Nursing Assistant Exam Fee	\$135	To become a CNA, one must pay take a certification exam (and they also require CPR Training)
EMT Exam	\$98	To become an EMT, you must pass the state-approved EMT exam
Pharmacy Technician Certification Exam (PTCE)	\$219	State exam required by pharmacies to practice as a pharmacy technician
Phlebotomy Technician Exam	\$119	Exam required to practice as a phlebotomist
Medical Assistant Exam	\$250	Exam many job seekers look for in applying medical assistant applicants, but not always required to practice

The cost of some of these exams is too high for some students to afford and yet, the completion of these exams is often a required obstacle for many to reach their pre-health goals. In FY17-18, according to CU Boulder’s Office of Data Analytics, of the 16,170 resident degree-seeking undergraduates enrolled in fall 2017, 18% (2,910) were dependent students eligible for Pell, an additional 20% (3,234) were dependent students with some financial need. Additionally, White families, in general, have the highest level of both median and mean family wealth (Bhutta et al., 2020). Roughly 40% of designated pre-health students identify as an underrepresented or minoritized student. Additionally, nearly 18% of designated pre-health students were first-generation students. And, first-generation students tend to come from low-income backgrounds (Startz, 2022).

Our proposed program would identify underrepresented students and/or students in financial need who have completed training for an entry-level allied health job, but need assistance covering the cost of their exam. Through the support of the Dean’s Innovation Fund, we can help students cover this cost and help students gain experience they need for their future health professions program. Additionally, CU Boulder’s IDEA Plan discusses the need to better retain underrepresented groups, which can impact their sense of belonging and retention (CU Boulder Idea Plan, 2019). Funding for this program could better align the efforts of OPHA with the campus IDEA Plan. Funding from this grant will help OPHA show the value of

this program and make it easier to show the need for future funding from the College of Arts & Sciences, which sponsors the office.

***Evaluation and Timeframe:***

Firstly, through this program, we anticipate our participants to have increased chance of acceptance into health professional schools due to the experiences gained from working in these entry-level jobs in healthcare. Second, we anticipate an increase in retention because students may feel a sense of support for their goals and dreams and may feel a sense of belonging and connection from our office and from A&S, increasing their likelihood of remaining at CU Boulder. We will monitor the retention rates and acceptance rates of students who participated in this program.

***Project Budget and Ask:***

This proposal has two possible options for funding:

1. Ideally, the request of \$6,000 can help the Office of Pre-Health Advising offer somewhere between 30-50 eligible students in financial need cover the cost of some of the exams required for a job in an entry-level allied health profession, which, can greatly increase their chances of being accepted by a future health professional school or program.
2. At minimum, if we utilize a total of \$2,550, we can help cover the \$85 cost of CPR and First Aid Training through our own on-campus resource, we can help 30 students who might be in financial need cover the cost of this fundamental training. The benefit here is that we can help get these students started in the process of getting other experiences that might require this training. The downside is that if a student does this, and this alone, it will not help their chances of obtaining entry into a health profession program, which is why we'd ideally love to have more funds to help more students who have already obtained their training toward one of the allied health entry-level jobs and fields.

## References

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