

# HRSA Develops Strategic Plan for Pacific Basin

By Houkje Ross

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In February 2000 the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) met with several other federal agencies and representatives from the six Pacific Basin jurisdictions to develop a strategic plan for improving health in the region.

The strategy involves creating better collaboration and communication with health ministers, health center administrators, medical staff and directors, and the community in the jurisdictions, said Paul Nannis, director of HRSA's Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Legislation.

"We are striving to listen to what the residents say they need," he added. "This is a very different approach from the past, which made the assumption that we, here in D.C., knew what the residents wanted."

HRSA's strategic plan is based on a 1998 report called Pacific Partnerships for Health, Charting a New Course. The non-partisan, Institute of Medicine (IOM), part of the National Academy of Sciences, produced the report for HRSA.

Some of the problems IOM identified include tuberculosis, Hansen's disease, lower life expectancies, and Vitamin A deficiencies due to poor diet. Even with federal funding, the residents of these islands are not as healthy as their mainland U.S. counterparts. Contributing factors, according to the IOM findings, are inadequate fiscal and personnel management systems, poorly maintained and equipped health care facilities, shortages of adequately trained health personnel, rapid economic development, and social changes.

Highlights from HRSA's strategic plan:

- **Keeping other agencies informed.** HRSA plans to establish a system to inform other offices, bureaus, and agencies about scheduled meetings and conferences with Pacific Basin representatives.

- **Reducing the use of hospital-based acute care.** Changing the region's dependence and overuse of hospital-based acute care is a significant element of the plan. According to the IOM report, there is not enough emphasis on public health and prevention programs.
- **Recruiting health professionals to the Pacific Basin.** HRSA administers the National Health Service Corps, which recruits medical school graduates to the Pacific Basin. Graduates provide services in exchange for loan repayment. HRSA sponsored six graduates for work in the Pacific Basin in FY 1999, and continues to recruit others.
- **Increasing funding for and use of telemedicine.** This is important because there are not enough specialty physicians in the area. In the past, if a resident had symptoms that were not recognized, or a mid-level physician did not know how to treat something, the patient would be flown to another location. This takes up a huge portion of the hospital's budget, Nannis said. "Telemedicine would allow medical information and treatment options to be done over the Internet."
- **Expanding primary care and maternal and child health initiatives.** HRSA will work to improve, upgrade, and expand primary care and maternal and child health initiatives across the six jurisdictions, and support abstinence programs in the region. The agency will continue to support Maternal and Child Health Community Integrated Service System grants for each jurisdiction, along with Emergency Medical Systems for Children grants.

*For more information, contact Paul Nannis, HRSA, 301-443-2460. ❖*

