



FEATURED MEMBER



The National Health Service Corps (NHSC) builds healthy communities by supporting qualified health care providers dedicated to working in areas of the United States with limited access to care. More than 40,000 primary care medical, dental, and mental and behavioral health professionals have served in the NHSC since its inception. Today, there are more than 10,000 NHSC members providing culturally competent care to more than 10.5 million people. We provide this care at more than 14,000 NHSC-approved health care sites in urban, rural, and frontier areas. The following story demonstrates the impact our members are having every day.

Tommie Stanberry, PA — Physician Assistant, Family Health Center of Southern Oklahoma, Tishomingo, OK

HER STORY: Tommie Stanberry and her sister were the first twins born in the tight-knit community of Coal County, Oklahoma. They grew up helping their grandfather run the county's first pharmacy, discovering the importance of delivering health care resources to the people of their small town; something Tommie continued to appreciate as she served her community as a Registered Nurse for 25 years.

Yet as her children grew up, Tommie wanted to do more to help the only doctor in her county provide better health care because she saw that many people in her community were not getting the care they needed. She decided to go back to school at the University of North Dakota to become a Physician Assistant—a position she now holds at the Family Health Center of Southern Oklahoma back in Coal County.

After just a few years working for the clinic, Tommie heard about the National Health Service Corps (NHSC) and the loan repayment assistance it provides to clinicians committed to working in communities with limited access to health care. She applied and was awarded loan repayment; this meant that Tommie could stay in her hometown and fulfill her dream of improving the community through her work as a clinician.

"I want to expand the presence of federally funded health clinics in Coal County because this is how members of our community—the majority of which is uninsured and low income—receive care," she said. "Without insurance, many are hesitant to visit the doctor because they fear they cannot afford treatment, which is an obstacle to providing preventative care and building healthy communities."

Lack of preventative care and education about leading healthy lifestyles leads many patients to Tommie's office with symptoms of hypertension, diabetes, and other conditions that could have been avoided with regular doctor visits. One of her male patients came to her clinic with symptoms of a heart related condition, and Tommie was not surprised to discover he had never had a checkup on the health of his heart. As they ran tests, she discovered he needed a bypass immediately to avoid a massive, potentially fatal, stroke.

Two weeks later, this same patient came back to bring her flowers and express his gratitude. "This clinic is needed to treat those who have nowhere else to turn," Tommie added. "This is why we need dedicated providers to work in primary care and stay in these communities."