



The knowledge you'll gain about the advantages of public health dentistry will enable you to make an informed career choice in the months before graduation from dental school.

You have decided that you want to devote your career to dentistry. Your next big choice: How to apply your degree. If you are eager to gain real-life practice in a clinical setting before you graduate, the Indian Health Service (IHS) Dental Externship Program will give you an opportunity to sharpen your skills while experiencing life in Native communities.

As you work side by side with dental professionals, you will gather valuable clinical lessons in general dentistry that expand your knowledge while you interact with patients of varying backgrounds. You may also have an opportunity to observe or even take part in community prevention programs that can minimize disease rates and promote general wellness. If you are not sure if public health dentistry is right for you, the experience can help you decide; if you're already interested in public health, the externship can be your first stepping-stone toward a fulfilling career.

An IHS dental externship is more than just a pre-professional experience; it provides a look into the future — a sneak preview at the opportunity, adventure and purpose that an Indian health career can offer. What better way to learn what an Indian health dental career is all about?

Program Highlights

Externship Benefits

As a dental extern, you'll practice general dentistry. In addition to getting hands-on experience in state-of-the-art facilities, you'll enjoy a number of other benefits from participation in the program:

- Experiencing life (and work) in a part of the country you may never have visited before.
- Immersing yourself within the culture and lifestyle of a Native community.
- Learning from professionals who serve as committed mentors.
- Forging close bonds with patients.

What's more, practicing alongside dental health professionals can open doors for your career in dentistry. By establishing relationships with those with whom you work, you will develop future professional contacts who can potentially serve as your advocates as you move forward in your field.

Cultural Experience

One of the most exciting aspects of a dental career with an Indian health program is the chance to live and practice in American Indian and Alaska Native communities. Some participating facilities are located in cities, but most are in rural settings. A number of facilities are geographically remote — surrounded by some of the most spectacular natural settings in the country.

Because Native people see a close connection between physical and spiritual well-being, the close bonds established between the facility staff and the community they serve is an integral part of the cultural experience. IHS externs are trained to embrace this duality; building relationships with peers and patients alike enables them to experience the Native heritage while fulfilling their professional goals at the same time.

Program Aspects

Eligibility

The IHS Dental Externship Program is an unpaid externship. It's available to dental students the summer prior to entering their final year of dental school. Please note, while US citizenship is not required for participation in this program, it is required for employment at federal and many Tribal facilities upon graduation from dental school.

Application Cycle

The Dental Externship Program accepts applications beginning in early January until the end of February, and selections are completed by the end of March. Applicants are encouraged to apply early in order to secure one of the limited available spots. When applying online, be prepared to complete your application in its entirety (the application will not allow you to go back and add information later). The application process takes up to 40 minutes, less if you prepare your essay in advance. Dental extern preceptors will review your application and determine your suitability for placement at an Indian health site. These preceptors are looking for adventurous and motivated individuals who are knowledgeable about IHS and public health dentistry.

Participation

Once selected, participants typically complete a two-week externship between April 1 and September 30. Specific dates are determined based on each Indian health facility's need. All externships require a collaborative agreement between the externship site and the extern's dental school in order to participate. It's recommended that you work with your school's externship coordinator to identify a list of IHS sites with an existing school agreement before applying.

Expense Reimbursement

IHS covers up to \$2,000 in travel expenses, including airfare and out-of-pocket expenses incurred by the participant such as housing (if free housing is not available), daily travel expenses to and from the site, baggage fees and other specified per diem. IHS processes all externship travel arrangements, including purchasing all airline tickets, through official government travel orders.

If you are accepted into the program, be prepared to cover your expenses and provide proper documentation for reimbursement.

For more information about the IHS Dental Externship program, visit www.ihs.gov/dentistry.

On an annual basis, 25 to 35 IHS sites award externships to more than 100 students from dental schools across the country. These include sites in:

- Alaska
- Arizona
- Idaho
- Minnesota
- Montana
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Oklahoma
- South Dakota
- Washington

