

FAQ - Medical Assistant Apprenticeship Program

BENEFITS

What are the benefits to me as an employer?

- You don't have to lose great employees while they work toward certification. Lower level clinical or non-clinical staff can become certified while still working full time.
- You can select new employees from the local community who already know your patient population, or you can select apprentices with a certain skill (e.g., bilingual in a particular language) that is not available in the current MA applicant pool.
- You get to train your MAs in the way things are done at your particular clinic. No re-training hassles.
- For new hires, you will have someone working at MA-C level for a fraction of the MA-C starting cost.
- MAs get extensive hands-on experience compared to college programs.
- There is a 10-week trial period, so you can be sure the MA is a good fit for your organization.
- In addition to technical skills, MAs are trained in Patient Centered Medical Home (PCMH) concepts. If your organization is transitioning to a PCMH model, your direct service staff will thoroughly understand PCMH principles and skills.

What are the benefits to the apprentice?

- No need to travel or move to another area to attend college
- Can work full time and earn wages & benefits while completing the program
- Much cheaper than a community or charter college
- Extensive hands-on experience in technical skills
- A broad skill set that ensures the MA is a valued member of the care team
- Experienced MAs who were classified as MA-R or MA-P after the certification changed in 2013 can get their certification without having to leave their jobs.

EXPECTATIONS

What do I have to provide?

- **Apprentice wages.** Apprentices are paid 92% of the starting MA-C salary (or minimum wage, whichever is greater). There is a wage increase to 96% at the midpoint of the program. In-REACH determines the MA-C starting salary based on an annual wage survey. The wage standards are minimums, so you can choose to pay your apprentices more if desired.
- **A 1:1 coach,** ideally an MA-C with at least 2 years of experience. The coach must share the apprentice's work schedule at least 75% of the time. The coach and apprentice do not need to work together as a single unit, but the coach should be available (in the vicinity) to answer questions and supervise new skills practice. If you have multiple apprentices, each one must have their own coach.

- **Scheduling considerations and time for skill practice.** It is very important that apprentices and coaches have the time to practice skills together. The model you use depends on your clinic needs and set-up, but we recommend the following if possible:
 - A daily or weekly schedule review to identify learning opportunities for the apprentice
 - At least 1 - 2 scheduled hours per week for the apprentice and coach to meet one-on-one to work on skills
 - A float who can cover for the coach or apprentice on the above occasions
 - The apprentice should NOT be a lead/primary assigned to a single provider, if possible, as this limits their flexibility. (Also consider carefully whether coaches who are leads will have enough time to spend with the apprentice).
 - The apprentice should NOT be used as a regular translator, as this takes up a lot of time they could be using practicing technical skills.
- **General support.** Although the program is designed to involve minimal work on the part of employers, it is important that the apprentice's direct supervisor and other administrators know what is going on in the program. We recommend a **monthly check-in meeting** with everyone at the clinic who is involved in the program (apprentices, coaches, supervisors and administrators), to review the apprentices' progress and troubleshoot any problems.
- **Data and feedback.** Once a year we will ask you to send us information on the wages and career progression of current and past apprentices. You may also be asked to complete a brief survey on your experience with the program a couple times a year. Lastly, you may be contacted by an evaluator (no more than annually) for an optional interview.
- **A contact person.** InReach needs one designated contact person at your organization who will receive regular communications about the program and forward them as needed.

How much paperwork do I have to do?

You will be given a spreadsheet to report your apprentices names, emails, clinic placements, hourly wage, and clinical support team members to InReach. You don't have to do any paperwork related to the online coursework. Apprentices need to keep timesheets and skill logs documenting their skill practice, which are signed off by a coach or supervisor.

How much work is this for the apprentice?

It is a lot of work. The apprentice must be very dedicated and committed to finishing the program. The online coursework is designed to take about 10 hours/week, but may take more than that. The three lab days are scheduled on Saturdays and they are unpaid.



TRAINING COSTS

Who pays the training fee?

We strongly recommend that the employer cover the \$3,750 training fee, as an investment in a committed, quality workforce.

Most employers who pay the training fee ask their apprentices to sign a 1- to 2-year commitment contract in exchange for this investment in their education. In-REACH will not invoice an apprentice for any tuition fees.

Is there a refund if the apprentice drops out of the program?

The refund schedule is as follows:

- Full refund within 2 weeks of program start
- 67% refund within 10 weeks of program start
- No refund after probationary period (10 weeks)

Are coaches paid?

Unfortunately, no. Although the program does not require extra time of the coach, we understand that it is an added responsibility. Some employers choose to pay their coaches a slight differential wage when working with an apprentice.

CERTIFICATION

What credential do program graduates receive?

After completing this program, graduates will take the *Certified Clinical Medical Assistant (CCMA)* exam administered by the National Healthcareer Association. The CCMA is a national credential, and it is also one of four exams accepted in Washington State as a pre-requisite to get the *Medical Assistant–Certified* state credential. Successful program graduates who pass the test will obtain both a state credential (MA-C), which allows them to work at any public or private clinic in Washington State, and a national credential (CCMA), which is accepted by many (but not all) employers in other states.

Can apprentices take the AAMA certification test if they want?

No, the apprenticeship program has not been approved as an AAMA training program. The only MA Certification testing program that currently accepts this program is the National Healthcareer Association.



ACCREDITATION

Do apprentices get college credit?

No. Apprentices are automatically co-enrolled at one of our partner community colleges, but do not receive any credits, degree, certificate, or grades from the college. These partnerships help us improve our curriculum and offer the program more broadly across the state.

APPRENTICE SCOPE OF WORK

What skills can an MA apprentice perform during their apprenticeship?

MA apprentices can perform any skills under the Medical Assistant Certified scope of work from the first day of their apprenticeship **WITH DIRECT VISUAL SUPERVISION** (from a coach or supervisor in the room watching the procedure).

For invasive, MA-C level skills, like injections and phlebotomy, we require that apprentices have completed all the required skills practice and been signed off as competent by their coach AND the course instructor before they can perform these skills independently (without direct visual supervision).

An apprentice can perform MA-R level skills independently (without direct visual supervision) after the coach and supervisor both feel the apprentice is competent in the skill. These skills do NOT require an instructor's signature.

As long as they are actively enrolled in the apprenticeship program, apprentices do NOT need to have obtained any MA credential to perform these skills. However, if an apprentice fails to pass the exam and is dis-enrolled from the program, they must stop performing MA-C level procedures until they have obtained either an interim or full MA-C credential. Employers will be contacted if this ever happens to one of their apprentices.

Do MA apprentices need to hold an MA-R or other clinical credential?

No, apprentices do not need to hold any credential while they are enrolled in the program. They should sign off as "MA Trainee."

SUPPORT & RESOURCES

What happens if I am having problems with the apprentice as an employee?

You should bring the issue to InReach staff, so they can communicate with the Apprenticeship Committee. The apprentice can also bring complaints against the employer to the Committee. The Committee mediates any disputes between employers and apprentices.



What happens if the apprentice is having problems in the program?

InReach is in regular contact with apprentices and can help troubleshoot problems. The program coordinators and course instructor can help if the apprentice is having problems with the coursework. If there is a significant issue, the Apprenticeship Committee will review the situation, talk to the apprentice and employer, and take appropriate action (from additional support to disciplinary suspension or removal from the program.)

How can I guarantee the apprentice won't take their certification and go elsewhere?

You can ask the apprentice to sign a commitment contract for a set time period. This is especially appropriate if the employer is paying for the program.

How much support can I expect from InReach?

InReach has several full-time employees dedicated to supporting this program. They stay in close contact with all apprentices and employers and can help resolve any program concerns. You can contact them any time with questions. They also send monthly progress reports to the apprentice, coach, and supervisor.

The Course Instructor is also available any time to answer apprentices' questions about technical skills they are learning. They review the online coursework and discussion posts, and provide regular feedback to apprentices.



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Visit us online at www.inreachpathways.org or contact:

Prudence Chilufya

Career Pathways Manager

360.786.9722 ext.207

pchilufya@wacommunityhealth.org