

Date of Hearing: April 22, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
 Buffy Wicks, Chair
 AB 1591 (Michelle Rodriguez) – As Introduced January 15, 2026

Policy Committee:	Health	Vote:	16 - 0
	Higher Education		10 - 0

Urgency: No State Mandated Local Program: No Reimbursable: No

SUMMARY:

This bill requires the Department of Health Care Access and Information (HCAI) to establish and administer the California Podiatric Pipeline Program (program) to support the educational advancement of California residents pursuing a doctor of podiatric medicine (DPM) degree.

Specifically, this bill:

- 1) Requires HCAI, in consultation with the California State University (CSU), the University of California (UC), the Podiatric Medical Board of California (PMBC), the California Podiatric Medical Association (CPMA), and accredited schools of podiatric medicine in California, to do all of the following:
 - Develop partnerships and agreements that link undergraduate institutions with California podiatric medical schools.
 - Provide mentorship, outreach, and clinical-shadowing opportunities for undergraduate students interested in podiatric medicine.
 - Create a structured pathway for eligible students to receive early admission consideration to participating podiatric medical schools, contingent on meeting academic and professional benchmarks.
 - Prioritize recruitment of students from underrepresented, rural, or medically underserved areas of the state.
- 2) Authorizes HCAI to award planning or coordination grants to participating universities or colleges to support implementation of this program as funding is made available.
- 3) Authorizes HCAI to use funds from the Health Professions Education Fund (HPEF) for the purposes of this bill.
- 4) Subject to an appropriation by the Legislature, requires HCAI to annually report to the Legislature on the program and recommendations for expanding residency opportunities for podiatric graduates.

FISCAL EFFECT:

HCAI estimates General Fund costs of \$899,000 in fiscal year 2026-27 and ongoing for administration, program oversight, and monitoring. To award planning and coordination grants to universities and colleges, staff would need to establish grant standards and procedures, review and approve grant applications, issue funds to awardees, monitor the awarded funds, and annually develop a report for the Legislature. HCAI anticipates it would need five staff.

HCAI states all funds in the HPEF are allocated and not available for discretionary spending.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose.** This bill is sponsored by the California Podiatric Medical Association (CPMA).

According to the author:

California is facing a growing shortage of [DPMs], particularly in rural and underserved communities. More than half of our counties lack adequate podiatric coverage, and nearly one quarter of the current workforce is expected to retire within five years. At the same time, enrollment in podiatric medical schools is declining, threatening our ability to meet future demand.

This shortage has serious consequences. Diabetes disproportionately impacts low-income communities and communities of color, and limited access to specialized foot care contributes to preventable hospitalizations and amputations. Yet, current law does not provide a structured pathway to recruit and prepare students, especially those from underrepresented backgrounds, for careers in podiatric medicine.

[This bill] creates a coordinated undergraduate to medical school pathway to expand the workforce, increase diversity in the profession, and improve access to preventive care in underserved areas.

- 2) **Background. DPMs.** DPMs, known as podiatrists, are podiatric physicians and surgeons, qualified by their education, training, and experience to diagnose and treat conditions affecting the foot, ankle, and related structures of the leg. A podiatrist may focus on specialty areas such as surgery, sports medicine, biomechanics, geriatrics, pediatrics, orthopedics, or primary care. DPMs receive basic and clinical science education and training comparable to that of medical doctors, including four years of undergraduate education focusing on life sciences, four years of graduate study in a podiatric medical college, and at least three years of postgraduate, hospital-based residency training.

Declining DOPM School Enrollment. California has two schools of podiatric medicine, Western University College of Podiatric Medicine (WesternU) in Pomona, and the California School of Podiatric Medicine at Samuel Merritt University in Oakland. In 2024-25, WesternU was at 62% of its enrollment capacity of 50 for the first year cohort and Samuel Merritt was at 52% of its enrollment capacity of 48 per class.

HPEF. HCAI administers numerous workforce programs and provides loans and scholarships for health care professionals, including HPEF. HPEF is funded solely through donations. All donated funds have been fully allocated, and HPEF has not received any new

contributions to support new programs. HPEF previously supported loan repayment programs for mental health services providers, nurses, and physicians, as well as scholarship programs for nurses and other professions. HPEF has an estimated \$8.2 million in funds, all of which are designated for other programs. HCAI does not consider these funds to be usable or available for discretionary spending.

Health Professions Pathways Program (HPPP). HPPP was created to recruit and support students from underrepresented regions and backgrounds to pursue health careers. HPPP includes pipeline programs, summer internships, and post undergraduate fellowships. HPPP is a competitive grant opportunity to award organizations that will develop and implement health professions pathways programs that can include pipeline programs, summer internships, and post undergraduate fellowships. Podiatry training is eligible for HPPP. In the past, awarded programs were eligible to receive up to \$575,000 annually for up to five years to support at least 240 students per academic year, for a total of approximately \$2.9 million per pipeline program.

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