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Prince George's mulls incentives to keep docs local

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Physicians and clinics in Prince George's County could reap big benefits from a county effort to finally address a long-standing shortage of medical professionals.

The County Council has ordered county health officials to develop a recruitment and retention strategy for doctors in Prince George's, which has proportionally fewer doctors than surrounding jurisdictions do.

That strategy could take many forms, but council Chairwoman **Ingrid Turner**, D-Bowie, is eyeing financial incentives — potentially student loan forgiveness, she said in an interview. Meanwhile, the CEO of the county's dominant hospital system suggests mortgage incentives or income tax breaks.

Details may not emerge until Oct. 1, when county Health Officer Dr. **Donald Shell** must present the "Blue Print to Improving Access to Health Care within Prince George's County," according to the council resolution, which was approved June 21. Shell also must develop strategies to improve overall health in the county as part of the plan.

Shell said he is working with a consultant to research loan repayment or tax based incentives. He also would like to see health care companies participate in County Executive Rushern Baker's proposed \$50 million economic development fund for new businesses.

"The question is," Shell said, "What does it take to make it desirable for health care businesses to open up a practice in a location with high numbers of

uninsured and Medicaid-insured patients?"

Prince George's County has 83 primary care doctors per 100,000 residents, according to a 2009 report by the [Rand Corp.](#) It lags far behind Montgomery County (212 per 100,000) and the District (242 per 100,000).

The comparative shortages span all medical specialties and are particularly pronounced in fields such as ophthalmology, anesthesiology and pulmonary disease.

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