



Virtual MA Training Program Frequently Asked Questions

MACHC created this FAQ document for health centers to reference as the association prepares to launch a new Virtual Medical Assistant (MA) Training program. MACHC will update the FAQs as needed. Please don't hesitate to contact Shamonda Braithwaite at sbraithwaite@machc.com or Alli Matson at amatson@machc.com with questions.

WHAT?

- **What is the Virtual MA Training program newly offered by MACHC?**

MACHC's new Virtual MA Training program is an online program that will prepare students for the [National Healthcareer Association's Certified Clinical Medical Assistant \(CCMA\) exam](#). The program curriculum consists of over 30 modules covering MA skills, Patient-Centered Medical Home concepts, social determinants of health, social screening, chronic disease management, and behavioral health screening. See the [training modules](#) and complete course list.

- **What is the origin of MACHC's Virtual MA Training program?**

The Washington Association for Community Health (WACH)—the primary care association for Washington state health centers—has administered a MA Apprenticeship program since 2014. As Washington state requires MAs to be certified, WACH's MA Apprenticeship program supports certification requirements and was created with community health centers top of mind. The program has been instrumental in recruitment and retention, supporting staff working at the top of license.

MACHC is licensing the online portion of WACH's MA Apprenticeship program. The association has also commissioned WACH to transition the entire online program to include a grading function for each module, reducing staff time that would otherwise be needed for administration.



- **How does MACHC's Virtual MA Training program differ from WACH's MA Apprenticeship program?**

All instruction in MACHC's MA Virtual Training program is provided online. WACHC's program requires an instructor to grade quizzes, in-person lab days, and for students to have a coach or preceptor. MACHC's Virtual MA Training program does not require those elements to allow students and health centers maximum flexibility. WACH's MA Apprenticeship program is structured in cohorts which requires students to participate in online learning at designated times. MACHC's new Virtual MA training program is fully asynchronous to allow students in Maryland and Delaware's health centers to access virtual training at any time.

WHO?

- **Who is MACHC's Virtual MA Training program for?**

Health centers can use MACHC's Virtual MA Training program to attract, onboard, and train newly hired MAs. The program can also be used to train existing, non-clinical employees in administrative functions, such as front desk staff, who want a career change. Existing MAs without certifications may also want to take this course. All students should be at least 18 years of age and have a GED-equivalent level of education and employed by a health center.

- **How do I enroll designated employees in MACHC's Virtual MA Training program?**

Health centers should complete [MACHC's Virtual MA Training program intake form](#). The intake form requires centers to identify student demographic and contact information. MACHC will use the information to enroll students and make the training available.



- **How can health centers recruit students for the Virtual MA Training program?**

If a health center is using MACHC's Virtual MA Training program to recruit new MAs, it can include a [brief description](#) of the program as a benefit of working at the health center in job postings, along with the center's [MA career ladder structure](#), if relevant. The description of the program paired with the career ladder will provide candidates with a clear vision of career progression opportunities at the health center.

To recruit existing employees for the Virtual MA Training program, health centers should share [MACHC's program collateral](#). Health centers should use discernment when choosing employees to participate in the virtual MA Training program and communicate to candidates that this is a long-term commitment. Furthermore, the center should provide a complete picture of MA responsibilities before enrolling a new student to support program completion and protect center investment.

- **How much does it cost to participate in MACHC's Virtual MA Training program?**

There is no tuition cost for the first two employees at each center. MACHC highly encourages health centers to pay for the cost of the required textbooks, ancillaries, and the CCMA exam fee, totaling approximately \$440 per person (as of August 2023). For any other student beyond the initial two, the health center must pay MACHC the tuition cost of **\$2,700 per person**. The health center should also cover the cost of the required textbook, ancillaries, and the CCMA exam fee. MACHC also recommends that the center pay for the cost of only one exam fee per employee. If the employee does not pass, the employee could bear the costs to retake the national exam.

- **How do I purchase the required textbook and optional study guide?**

The required textbook for the training program is *Clinical Procedures for Medical Assistants, 11th Edition* textbook. There is also an optional study



guide. The textbook and study guide are available in electronic or printed formats and can be purchased using the links below.

- **Electronic:** [Textbook](#), [Study Guide](#)
- **Printed:** [Textbook/Study Guide Package](#), [Textbook Only](#), [Study Guide Only](#)

- **How many students can a health center enroll in the Virtual MA Training program?**

MACHC paid tuition fees for two employees per health center organization. If a health center wants to enroll additional students, it can. There is no limit on the number of students a health center can enroll; the health center will need to pay MACHC for all enrollees beyond the first two.

- **How long will it take a student to complete MACHC's Virtual MA Training program?**

It depends on how much time per week a student can devote to the program. The online course work can be completed in as fast as 10 months, if a student devotes about 10 hours per week. A health center may want to consider how it might provide designated time during the workday towards training completion. Students willing to devote off-work hours to career development or centers that use a dedicated portion of core skill building as part of an onboarding process could complete the training more quickly.

Given the adapted program's newness, MACHC cannot be more definitive about program completion time. As more students enroll and undergo the program, MACHC will have data to better inform questions about the length of the program and will subsequently update health centers.



- **How do students register for the CCMA exam after completing the Virtual MA Training Program?**

After completing the virtual training, students should register for the Certified Clinical Medical Assistant Exam on the National Healthcareer Association's website at <https://www.nhanow.com/get-certified>.

- **What happens if a student does not complete the Virtual MA Training program?**

For MACHC-funded students: If a student whose tuition was funded by MACHC leaves the program within two weeks of enrolling, the health center can replace that student at no cost. If a student leaves the program after two weeks, MACHC will charge the health center for the association's investment. If the center wants to enroll another student, it will need to pay the full cost of tuition and fees for that student.

For health center-funded students: If a center paid MACHC for a student's tuition, and that student drops out of the program in the first two weeks, MACHC will issue a full refund to the health center. If the student drops out between the third and tenth weeks, there is a 67 percent refund. If the student leaves after the tenth week, there is no refund.

It is imperative that health centers use great discernment when enrolling students to mitigate the need for these situations. Centers should clearly explain to students that the training program is a relatively long-term commitment and the responsibilities of the MA before enrolling them.

- **How can centers mitigate MAs leaving the center after obtaining the national credential?**

Centers may decide to require students to sign a commitment contract for a set time in exchange for the center's investment in their education. As a best practice, some Washington state health centers ask students to sign a one-to-two-year commitment agreement to participate in the program. If the employee ends employment with the center before two years upon



certification or course completion, the employee must pay back a prorated monthly amount. For example, if an employee had a contract to stay at least two years and resigned after 18 months from certification and course completion, the employee could reimburse the center 25 percent of the total investment.

HOW?

- **Are centers required to pair students with coaches or preceptors to learn tactical skills while on the job while participating in the Virtual MA Training program?**

MACHC acknowledges the challenges some centers face in securing student preceptors or coaches, given the lack of staff availability and competing demands. As such, MACHC does not require centers to pair students with coaches or preceptors. However, MACHC encourages centers to provide on-the-job learning opportunities with sufficient oversight for a new MA that has not completed a training program, just as a center otherwise would without this program or completion of a comparable program.

- **If a health center uses coaches or preceptors, are they required to take the Virtual MA training program?**

If a health center decides to pair its students with coaches or preceptors, MACHC will not require the coach or preceptor to undergo the training program. Familiarity with the order of each training session will be helpful so that the coach can provide on-the-job training opportunities with oversight as new skills are demonstrated. This can be obtained with familiarity of the [curriculum](#).



- **Do centers have to use a career ladder with the Virtual MA Training program?**

MACHC does not require health centers to use a career ladder to participate in the Virtual MA Training program. However, MACHC encourages health centers to consider using career ladders with the Virtual MA Training program to support recruitment and retention.

Health centers have the discretion to design career ladders, set MA designations, and pay in a manner that works best for their organizations. Centers could incentivize existing MAs with promotion opportunities and salary increases for coaching and mentoring trainees; a center can alter an illustrative [MA career ladder](#) to best fit its needs.

- **Should health centers designate time during the workday for students to complete the Virtual MA Training program?**

It is not required for centers to designate time during work hours to allow students to progress through the virtual training program. That said, MACHC encourages centers to devote some on-the-job time to reinforce the value of educational development. One center used [this Clinical Skills Assessment Checklist](#) to track the hands-on skills students learned to reinforce lessons learned in the virtual training.

Students could also be incentivized to complete some portion of the virtual program on their own time outside of work, especially if they want to complete the program at a faster pace.

For new MAs, centers also have the option to front-end load training during the first weeks on the job, which could help reduce the onboarding and training burden on existing staff.

- **How can centers with existing MA training partnerships engage with this program?**

This program may be used in addition to other MA training relationships community health centers may already have with local community colleges



or other educational institutions. The program is intended to be another option to recruit candidates from high school, those working in nursing homes, administrative employees, and others. The program is designed to support those that need to earn money, at the same time as the desire to advance training in a meaningful career.

WHY?

- **Why is MACHC offering this new Virtual MA Training program?**

MACHC is offering the new MA training program as a tool to support health centers in recruiting and retaining high-quality MAs, who play an essential role in community health center workflows and patient care delivery.

- **What are the benefits of the Virtual MA Training program to health centers?**

Health centers can benefit from the MA training program in many ways including:

- Centers can use the program as a recruitment and retention tool, especially when paired with a career ladder.
- Centers can retain great employees while they work towards certification; incentivizing career growth and development for those that can't afford not to work.
- Centers can select new employees from the local community who already know their patient population, or they can select students with a certain skill that is not already available in the current MA applicant pool (e.g., bilingual).
- The program is relatively inexpensive compared with other training options.
- As centers incorporate hands-on training to supplement the virtual learning, centers can train MAs with any center-specific operational nuances.
- In addition to technical skills, MAs are trained in Patient-Centered Medical Home concepts.



- **What are the benefits of the Virtual MA Training program to students?**

Students can benefit from the MA training program in many ways, including:

- Working full-time and earning wages and benefits while completing the program.
- No financial outlay compared to community college.
- Training covers a broad skill set to ensure the MA is a valued care team member.
- Students will benefit from hands-on technical skills experience.

WHEN?

- **When will health centers be able to enroll students in the program?**

Health centers can enroll students into the program by completing the Program Intake Form and submitting it to MACHC. MACHC requests that centers complete the form as soon as possible. Enrollment is ongoing.