

Vermont Educational Loan Repayment Program

Nurses (RN and LPN)

2027 PROGRAM OVERVIEW and PARTICIPANT ELIGIBILITY

The purpose of this educational loan repayment program is to increase access to health and dental care in underserved communities and to address the health professional shortages that cause disparities in access to health care in Vermont.

Category	Eligibility Standard
Description	Funded by federal State Loan Repayment Program (SLRP), state, and local funds. AHEC, on behalf of the state, shall make loan repayment awards in exchange for contractual service commitments by eligible health care professionals. Recipient must have outstanding educational debt acquired in the pursuit of an undergraduate or graduate degree from an accredited college or university that exceeds the amount of the loan repayment award. Up to \$10,000 maximum total funds annually (federal/state + match funds).
Award Amount + Employer Match	Current educational loan debt must exceed \$10,000. Maximum amount from federal/state sources is \$5,000 for full-time practitioners (\$10,000 total with employer match); \$2,500 in state/federal funds per year for half-time practitioners (\$5,000 total with employer match). Awards go directly to pay educational loans. Employer match is voluntary; but required for 2-year awards/service commitments (available to RNs only). Once the Employer application (Section E) is submitted to AHEC the employer match pledge <u>cannot be rescinded</u> at a later date.
Tax Liability	The federal Affordable Care Act passed on March 23, 2010, treats debt repayment under the AHEC administered Vermont Educational Loan Repayment Program for Healthcare Professionals as exempt for income tax purposes.
Prioritization for Awards	Program objectives/selection criteria are established annually by the Vermont Department of Health in consultation with AHEC, in accordance with Vermont laws, and the federal Public Health Service Act, to strategically respond to the most pressing health care workforce needs in the state. Priorities are those areas which are underserved with special consideration for Vermont's most rural, underserved, and undersupplied areas (see federally designated Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs) at http://hpsafind.hrsa.gov). Other factors <i>may</i> include local goals for improved service through workforce recruitment/retention; applicant educational loan debt level; number of hours per week that applicant works; serving as a preceptor to Vermont health professions students; or other awarding parameters.
Prioritization for Awards: Data-driven	Applicants are encouraged to review available data about Vermont's nursing workforce prior to completing an application. These data inform the state's prioritization for awards. • https://www.healthvermont.gov/health-statistics-vital-records/health-care-systems-reporting/health-care-workforce (Source: VDH) • Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA) designations and scores:http://hpsafind.hrsa.gov

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Citizenship	Recipients of federal SLRP funds must be United States citizens or nationals (naturalized citizens). U.S. citizenship not required for state funds.
State of Residence	Per legislative statute, recipient must be a Vermont resident (and legally authorized to work in the U.S.); must serve in Vermont.
Eligible Specialties	Nursing specialties which have an identified shortage of RNs and LPNs and/or difficulty recruiting and retaining RNs and LPNs (see eligible work sites).
Eligible Nurses: Hours	Half-time (20-39 hours/week): Must practice at least 18 hrs/week in direct clinical care, which may include up to 4 hrs/week in teaching activities and up to 4 hrs/week in approved alternative settings. Up to 2 hrs/wk for administrative duties can contribute to the 20 hr/week minimum. Full-time (40 hours/week): Must practice at least 36 hrs/week in direct clinical care, which may include up to 8 hrs/week in teaching activities and up to 12 hrs/week in approved alternative settings. Up to 4 hrs/wk for administrative duties can contribute to the 40 hr/week minimum. Vermont K-12 public school nurses must work a minimum average of 20 hours per week during the academic year, in accordance with the published school calendar. Clinical service must last at least 45 weeks per year; participants who take more than 7 weeks of leave in a service year (for any reason), fail to meet the 45-week minimum. Award decisions factor average clinical hours per week and awards vary on full-time (40 hrs/week) vs. half-time (20-39 hrs/week) status.
Ineligible Nurses	Those not listed as “eligible nurses.” Other ineligible nurses: per diem; temporary nurses; contracted nurses; traveling nurses; individuals whose citizenship may limit their ability to fulfill the service obligation of this program. Nurses with a current incentive program contractual service obligation with the federal government, state, employer, or other entity, including loan repayment contractual obligation from other sources, unless that service obligation will be completely satisfied before this program’s contract has been signed. Note: certain provisions in employment contracts can create a service obligation (e.g., an employer offers a bonus in return for the nurse’s agreement to work at that facility for a certain period of time or pay back the bonus). Individuals who have loans through the federal Health Resources and Services Administration are not eligible. A recipient cannot have more than one incentive program contractual service obligation for a specified timeframe. Those with breach of contract for a previous service obligation.

Educational Debt Current debt must exceed \$10,000.	Educational debt is verified. Loan(s) must be in good standing. The current loan balance must be greater than the total amount of educational loan repayment award (see minimum award amount). Qualifying debt are educational loans obtained through a U.S. student loan program and may not include any loans consolidated with another person or borrowed for another person's educational pursuit, nor may they include mortgage, car, credit card, personal, family, business, or any other type of non-educational loan. This program is a partnership between the recipient, the State of Vermont, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and communities/practices/employers/foundations to improve access to care through contractual service obligations in exchange for educational debt reduction.
Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF)	Because of recent changes to the PSLF program and audits of individual loan accounts, some borrowers are being notified of retroactive educational loan forgiveness on federal Direct Loans. A retroactive loan forgiveness date may result in overpayment and reimbursement of the overpayment. As per federal guidance regarding PSLF's impact on educational loan repayment programs, such as those administered by AHEC, the expectation is that any reimbursement issued from an awardee's lender due to excess payments that resulted from disbursements from the Vermont Educational Loan Repayment program should be returned to the educational loan program that it originated from. Please notify AHEC immediately if you received AHEC administered funds in 2025 and/or 2026 and are eligible for PSLF reimbursement due to overpayment. Those employed by nonprofit organizations and eligible for PSLF are strongly encouraged to enroll. To learn more about PSLF please visit www.studentaid.gov. If PSLF assists with loan payoff prior to the service obligation period end date, it does not alter the service obligation period. If any funds have been disbursed by this program the service contract period remains active and in effect until fulfilled. Award funds are applied to outstanding loans up to the total amount of the award. To maximize the amount of these limited program funds please do not apply to this program if you are approaching educational loan pay off through Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF).
Finances	Applicant <u>must not</u>: have any federal judgment liens; have defaulted on any federal payment obligations including student loans; have any federal or non-federal debt written off as uncollectible; have received a waiver of any federal payment obligation.
Eligible Work Sites	Healthcare facilities (e.g., critical access hospitals, FQHC/CHCs, free clinics (paid employees only), skilled nursing/long term care facilities, home health, mental health, substance use disorder, and health department), K-12 public schools, located in Vermont. Hospital eligibility (outside of CAHs) is prioritized to psychiatric and substance use disorder care nurses.
Ineligible Work Sites	Those not listed as "eligible work sites." Planned Parenthood health centers and primary care practices (out-patient/urgent care) are <u>ineligible</u> except those practices designated as Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), and Rural Health Centers (RHCs).
Eligible Work Sites: Patient Policies	Accepts patients with coverage under Medicare, Medicaid, Vermont's Children's Health Insurance Program (Dr. Dynasaur), or other state-funded health care benefit programs.

Ineligible Work Sites: Patient Policies	Practice sites/practitioners that charge patient membership/enrollment fees (under any name, i.e., health fee, direct-to-patient fee, concierge fee, etc.) are not eligible practice sites/practitioners for the VT Educational Loan Repayment Program. A high priority for this program is to increase access for Medicaid, rural, vulnerable, and underserved patient populations; membership fees can be a barrier for this program's primary target population.
Service Obligation Duration	RN recipients may have up to a 2-year (24 month) service commitment. The duration of a 2-year service commitment is for two continuous years of service; disbursement may come up front for two years, or after at the start of each year of service. Employment will be verified prior to disbursement of funds. LPNs are currently eligible only for a 1-year service commitment. The service period will be defined in the award contract and cannot start prior to a fully executed contract or work start date, whichever is later, without prior approval. No credit for practice prior to executed contract. No credit for practice while in school or training. No credit during a leave of absence, or while working but not carrying out clinical duties (as per eligibility requirements). Recipients who take a leave of absence (for any reason, including paternity leave, work-related injury, etc) and do not meet the 45-week service requirements, are required to extend the service contract end date.
Service Obligation: Worksite A new job opportunity does not "cancel" this obligation	An award is for one specific worksite and timeframe (i.e., recipient "locks in" to a job for the duration of the contract). Awards/contracts are not transferable. Changing worksites during a service obligation is rarely authorized except for internal worksite transfers within the same organization. A request for a worksite transfer exception must be made prior to changing worksites. Participants who voluntarily resign from their worksite(s) or are terminated by their worksite(s) for cause may be placed in breach of contract. If you want flexibility to change jobs at any time, this program is <u>not</u> a fit for you.
Reapplication & Lifetime Maximum Up to \$40,000 maximum state funds over 4 years	If receiving a 2-year award, re-application is not needed for the second year. One-year awards/service contracts must re-apply annually. May receive loan repayment funds for maximum of four years per individual.
Award Cancellation or Contract Termination	Award offers can be cancelled without penalty prior to a fully executed (i.e., signed) contract and/or prior to disbursement. The award and service contract are cancelled in its entirety in the event of a participant's death. Contracts may have service and repayment obligations waived or postponed (temporary leave) if there occurs incapacity of the participant due to serious illness. Decisions are at the discretion of the program and require medical documentation. Temporary leave (up to one year) may be granted, and the service period amended (i.e., extended) if compliance with the obligation is temporarily impossible or an extreme hardship.

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	Contract termination due to extenuating, unforeseen and documented circumstances may be requested by a participant, in writing, and <u>with repayment</u> of loan repayment funds disbursed under that contract. The contract termination will not be effective unless the participant submits a written request, the request is approved by the program, and the participant <u>repays all</u> loan repayment funds paid under the contract within 30 days. Awards are dependent on funding from the State of Vermont and/or U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Should the program funding be withdrawn or reduced prior to award disbursement, the contractual service agreement will be terminated or revised. Changes in employment after a contract has been executed and following the disbursement of funds may result in a breach of service obligation.
Breach of Service Obligation This is serious. The financial penalties are significant. Think carefully before entering a service contract.	A breach of service can occur after a service contract has been fully executed (i.e., signed), and a disbursement made. If the participant fails to complete service, the participant will incur a debt to the State in an amount not less than the damages that would be owed under the NHSC Loan Repayment default provision. See https://nhsc.hrsa.gov/. Damages include financial and penalty and interest. Participant must repay as defined in the service contract, plus interest and collection costs. The interest rate is the maximum legal prevailing rate, as determined by the Treasurer of the United States, from the date of the breach. Applicants are ineligible if they have ever breached or received a waiver of a prior service obligation to the federal/state/local government or other entity, even if they subsequently satisfied the repayment obligation. Breach of service obligations are reported to funders and may result in reduced funding to the program. A breach of service has serious consequences for the individual as well as the VT State Educational Loan Repayment program and its goal to support access to care.