

Vermont Educational Loan Repayment Program for Nurses (RN and LPN)

2019 PROGRAM OVERVIEW and PARTICIPANT ELIGIBILITY

The purpose of this state 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 state and local funds. AHEC, on behalf of the state, shall make loan repayment awards in exchange for 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 (see award amount minimum).
Award Amount	Up to \$10,000 in state funds per year. \$5,000 minimum in state funds per year. State awards may be enhanced by employer or community matching funds. Awards go directly to pay educational loans (lender will be requested to apply payment directly to loan principal to have the greatest impact on debt reduction). Note: This program is competitive with limited funding.
Tax Liability	The federal Affordable Care Act passed on March 23, 2010 treats debt repayment under the Vermont Educational Loan Repayment Program for Healthcare Professionals as exempt for income tax purposes.
Prioritization for Awards (Nurses working at the Vermont Psychiatric Care Hospital are identified as highest priority, effective 2016)	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 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. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vermont Board of Nursing Relicensure Surveys (source: VT AHEC) www.vtahec.org Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA) designations and scores http://hpsafind.hrsa.gov
Citizenship	Recipient must be legally authorized to work in the U.S.
State of Residence	Recipient must be a Vermont resident.
Eligible Specialties	Nursing specialties which have an identified shortage of RNs and LPNs and/or difficulty recruiting and retaining RNs and LPNs.
Eligible Nurses (READ CAREFULLY: limited eligibility effective 2016)	Employment as a nurse (RN or LPN) at an eligible work site; includes public health nurses employed by the State of Vermont. Based on identified state priorities and reduced program funding, eligibility is limited to nurses delivering direct care in nursing homes, long-term care, home health, state public health, and mental health, behavioral health, and substance abuse settings. Public health nurses employed by the State of Vermont, in various roles and community settings, are eligible.
Eligible Nurses: Hours	Must practice a minimum average of 20 clinical hours per week in that position during the year of service and at least 45 weeks per year; participants who take more than 7.14 weeks of leave in a service year (for any reason), fail to meet the 45 week minimum. Public health nurses, employed by the State of Vermont, also must work a minimum average of 20 hours per week for a 45 week minimum.

Educational Debt	<p>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).</p> <p>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 loan.</p> <p>If awarded funds, each recipient is required to continue making their own monthly payment(s) in addition to this award to further reduce overall educational debt; the recipient's own debt reduction effort is viewed favorably in future applications. A goal of this program is to work in a partnership between the recipient, the State of Vermont, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and communities/practices/employers/foundations to reduce educational debt; these funds are a direct investment in Vermont's workforce and achieving debt reduction must be demonstrated to show impact and ensure the program's continuation.</p>
Finances	<p>Applicant must <u>not</u>: have any federal judgment liens; have defaulted on any federal payment obligations; have any federal or non-federal debt written off as uncollectible; have received a waiver of any federal payment obligation.</p>
Ineligible Nurses	<p>Those not listed as "eligible nurses." Hospital-based nurses are ineligible except for those working in psychiatric care. Per diem; temporary nurses; contracted nurses; traveling nurses; and school nurses; individuals whose citizenship may limit their ability to fulfill the service obligation of this program; nurses with a current contractual service obligation with the federal government, state, 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. Please note that 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 Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, Bureau of Health Professions are not eligible.</p>
Eligible Work Sites	<p>Healthcare facilities (e.g. hospitals, nursing homes, home health, mental health, health department) located in Vermont or an accredited hospital within 10 miles of the Vermont border that have an identified shortage of RNs and LPNs and/or difficulty recruiting and retaining RNs and LPNs. Effective 2016 cycle, hospital eligibility is limited to psychiatric care nurses.</p>
Ineligible Work Sites	<p>Those not listed as "eligible work sites." Primary Care offices are ineligible except primary care practices designated as Federally Qualified Health Centers [FQHCs], and Rural Health Centers [RHC]. Effective 2016 cycle, hospital eligibility is limited to only psychiatric care nurses.</p>
Eligible Work Sites: Patient Policies	<p>Accepts patients with coverage under Medicare, Medicaid, Vermont's Children's Health Insurance Program (Dr. Dinosaur), or other state-funded health care benefit programs.</p>
Reapplication & Lifetime Maximum	<p>Recipients will have 1-year service commitments. Employment will be verified prior to disbursement of funds. May receive loan repayment funds for maximum of four years per individual.</p>
Service Obligation Period	<p>Contracts are for 1 year (12 months) of service. One year of service per year of funding. Service period will be defined in award contract and cannot start prior to a fully executed contract or work start date, whichever is later. No credit for practice prior to executed contract. No credit for practice while in school or training. No credit during a leave of absence. Recipients who take a leave of absence (for any reason) are required to extend the service contract end date.</p>
Changing Job Site/Request to Transfer	<p>Changing job sites (within VT) during a service obligation is highly discouraged: awards/contracts are not transferrable. If allowed by the funding source(s), exceptions may be granted at the discretion of the program director and require compelling circumstances. A request for a work site transfer exception must be made prior to changing job sites. A breach of service contract may result if the participant leaves the job without prior approval.</p> <p>Participants who voluntarily resign from their sites without prior approval from the program director or are terminated by their site(s) for cause may not receive a transfer to another site and may be placed in breach of contract.</p>

<p>Award Cancellation or Contract Termination</p>	<p>Award offers can be cancelled without penalty <u>prior</u> to a fully executed (i.e., signed) contract.</p> <p>The award and service contract is cancelled in its entirety in the event of a participant’s death.</p> <p>Fully executed contracts may have service and repayment obligations waived if there occurs incapacity of the participant due to serious illness, or other compelling personal circumstances arise. Waiver decisions are at the discretion of the program director.</p> <p>Contract termination due to extenuating circumstances may be requested by a participant, in writing, and with repayment 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 director, and the participant repays all loan repayment funds paid under the contract within 30 days.</p> <p>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 <u>prior</u> to award disbursement, the agreement will be terminated or revised.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Changes in employment after a contract has been executed may result in a breach of service obligation.</p>
<p>Breach of Service Obligation</p>	<p>A breach of service can occur after a service contract has been fully executed (i.e., signed), whether funds have been disbursed or not.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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 as a whole.</p>