

South Carolina Rural Practice Loan Forgiveness Program

Purpose

Given the ongoing need for physicians in underserved portions of South Carolina, this loan forgiveness program will be awarded to **physician assistant** students who commit to practice in a primary care or critical need specialties in rural South Carolina.

Award

The SC Center for Rural and Primary Healthcare offers a loan award up to \$40,000 in educational costs (i.e. tuition, fees) over the course of the PA educational program. This program functions as a forgivable student loan payable to the institution.

Awards will go to applicants from participating schools on a first come first served basis.

Commitment

Loan forgiveness award recipients will agree to practice in a primary care or a critical need specialty within a rural area of South Carolina upon program completion. Term of service will be for a minimum of three (3) years for physician assistant. Primary care specialties are defined as family medicine, primary care internal medicine, primary care pediatrics, primary care internal medicine/pediatrics. Critical need specialties are defined as obstetrics and gynecology, psychiatry and general surgery.

The SC Center for Rural and Primary Healthcare will designate approved practice locations. Factors considered in assigning approved practice sites will include county population density, underserved areas as defined by the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control, healthcare provider density, chronic disease burden and other community health factors.

The loan will be serviced through the South Carolina Student Loan Corporation. Recipients agree to pay back any loan funds received, plus interest and penalties, if they choose a practice specialty other than those specified above or do not practice in an approved site in South Carolina for the entire commitment time.

Loan forgiveness recipients will be expected to sign a commitment agreement, which further defines the expectations and requirements related to acceptance of this award. As part of the commitment agreement, recipients will sign a promissory note for the value of the loan received. To verify program adherence, annual attestations will be required during PA graduate school and the practice commitment term.

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Selection Criteria

The SC Center for Rural and Primary Healthcare is partnered with the South Carolina Student Loan Corporation in order to administrate the program and facilitate the necessary follow-up with each of participating student.

Program Criteria
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Be a citizen of the United States
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Open to all applicants regardless of residency since obligation to practice in South Carolina is stipulated in the agreement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Be eligible to obtain appropriate professional licensure in South Carolina
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Enrollment in accredited, state affiliated health professions school located in South Carolina
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Maintaining good academic and professional standing in health professions programs. Students on academic or professional probation/remediation will be reviewed by the program and may lose the ability to participate.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Commitment to practice in approved primary care specialties: Family Medicine, General Pediatrics, General Internal Medicine, General Internal Medicine/Pediatrics ▪ Or critical need specialties: Obstetrics/Gynecology, General Psychiatry, General Surgery
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Preference will be given to students from underserved/rural areas and/or those who are minorities underrepresented in medicine. Preference will also be given to South Carolina residents.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The applicant will not have another current service obligations to the Federal Government (e.g., National Health Service Corps, Military Service Obligations), or a State, or another entity prior to the beginning the program. The applicant will not have defaulted on any previous service obligations to the Federal Government or State of South Carolina.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The applicant will not enroll in another federal, State of South Carolina, or other state repayment program nor one with another public or private entity (examples: community hospital recruitment program)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Individuals in the Reserve Component of the U.S. Armed Forces or National Guard are eligible to participate. If participation in the reserves, in combination with other absences from the services site, exceed 35 workdays per service year, the service

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<p>obligation will be extended to compensate for the break in “full-time” service.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Applicants may only receive program support once.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Not have a judgment lien against property for debt to the United States.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Not have defaulted on any FEDERAL payment obligations (e.g., Health Education Assistance Loans, Federal income tax liabilities, Federal Housing Authority loans, etc.).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Commit to full-time clinical practice, providing primary health services, at an eligible site. “Full-time” clinical practice and “eligible practice sites” are defined above in <i>Program Requirements and Contractual Obligations</i>.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Commit to practice in eligible rural SC counties in a setting approved by the SC Center for Rural and Primary Healthcare for rural practice. Eligible counties must have populations of 100,000 or fewer persons according to the most recent United States Census and be designated as a Primary Medical Care or Mental Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA) by the federal government. ▪ While the Census and HPSA designation is an important qualifier for this program, the program will not approve practice sites solely upon a HPSA designation. Criteria for selection also include priority targeting of SC counties (Population Tiers), including Health Outcomes, Specialty mix, Practice Type, presence of other program recipients, County Rank, and Previous Awards. ▪ All recipients are required to sign an agreement to the terms and conditions upon which awards are granted. This establishes the amount of the award, the terms and conditions of program participation, obligated service, and the conditions of default and repayment.

Practice Location

Award recipients must practice their profession for a period of at least three years at a site approved by the SC Center for Rural and Primary Healthcare. Approved sites must be located in a federally recognized Primary Medical Care Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA) or Mental Health Professional Shortage Area (MHPSA) for psychiatry, which are also in a SC County designated as high need according the SC Center for Rural and Primary Healthcare methodology.

Recipients must practice their specialty full-time in the practice entity named in the application. “Full-time clinical practice” is defined as a minimum of 40 hours per week of patient care at an

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approved service site, with no more than eight of those hours per week devoted to practice-related administrative activities. At least 32 of the minimum 40 hours per week must be spent providing direct patient care. These services must be conducted during normally scheduled office hours in the ambulatory care setting office(s). The remaining hours must be spent providing inpatient care to patients of the approved site and/or performing practice-related administrative activities. Research and teaching are not considered to be “clinical practice” and time spent “on-call” is not considered part of full-time practice.

An exception to these rules is allowed for providers of obstetrical care. For providers of obstetrical care, the majority of full-time service (not less than 21 hours per week) is to be devoted to direct patient care in an approved ambulatory care practice site during normal scheduled office hours. The remaining hours can be spent providing inpatient care to patients of the approved site and/or on practice related administrative duties. Time spent on administrative duties cannot exceed eight hours per week. Time spent “on-call” is not considered part of full-time practice. For all clinicians, 40 hours per week may be compressed into no less than four days per week with no more than 12 hours of work to be performed in any 24-hour period. Hours worked over 40 hours per week will not be applied to any other work week. Participants must work at least 45 weeks per service year providing primary health services. No more than seven weeks (35 workdays) per year can be spent away from the practice for vacation, holidays, continuing professional education, illness, or any other reason. Absences greater than seven weeks in a service year will extend the service commitment end date. The funds that the recipient may receive from this program are in addition to any other salary, benefits or other compensation the physician receives as part of a practice and/or employment arrangement provided there is no duplication of benefits. Recipients will be responsible for submitting required annual reports to allow the SC Center for Rural and Primary Healthcare to monitor compliance with the requirements.

CANCELLATION PROVISION The only permissible basis for canceling a contract is the death or total and permanent disability of the participant.

In order to qualify for a cancellation of the service obligation based on disability, a participant must document a medical condition or a personal situation that makes compliance with the obligation permanently “impossible” or an “extreme hardship” such that enforcement would be against equity and good conscience. An example would be an illness so debilitating that the participant can no longer practice his/her profession.

SUSPENSION PROVISION Participants may request a suspension of their obligation. A Suspension may be granted for up to 1 year. In order to qualify for a suspension, the participant must document a medical condition or personal situation that makes compliance with the

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obligation temporarily “impossible” or an “extreme hardship” such that enforcement would be against equity and good conscience. Examples would be the terminal illness of an immediate family member for whom the participant is caretaker or extended maternity leave due to medical complications.

DEFAULT PROVISION Participants who fail to begin or complete their service obligation or otherwise breach the terms and conditions of the obligation are in default of their contracts and are subject to the financial consequences outlined in their contracts.

Students who are dismissed from an educational program will be considered in default of their contract.