

March 7, 2023



As the member organizations of the Federation of Associations of Schools of the Health Professions (FASHP), we are writing to welcome you to the 118th Congress.

FASHP was created in 1968 as a forum for representatives of health professions education institutions to address education's role in organizational patterns of health care; to encourage effective collaboration among the professions in education and practice; to prepare health professions education for the future; and to serve as a liaison with other organizations sharing an interest in health professions education. FASHP comprises 19 associations representing a health professions education community that includes 7,429 programs, institutions, hospitals, and health systems, and more than 1.3 million students, faculty, clinicians, administrators, residents, and researchers.

FASHP looks forward to collaborating with you on policies that strengthen and promote the professional health care workforce and the vital role education plays in supplying the nation with highly trained health care and public health professionals. As the 118th Congress begins its work, our member organizations stand ready to work with you to promote policies that bolster the nation's health care workforce and ensure that Americans have access to high-quality health care services.

Mindful of our country's recovery from COVID-19 and preparation for tomorrow, the importance of a well-trained health care and public health workforce is more critical than ever. Efforts to modernize public health infrastructure should continue, and we respectfully urge you to consider the unique economic and education needs of the nation's health professions schools, faculty, and students. This includes the prioritization and protection of our students and health care workforce's mental health, continued support for student aid programs like the Pell Grant and its expansion to graduate students, the incorporation of student loan forgiveness for health professionals in legislation, and robust support for Title VII and Title VIII health professions workforce, education, and development programs administered by the Health Resources and Services Administration.

In addition, FASHP requests Congress ensure continued investment in financial aid programs important to health professions students, including through the federal Direct Graduate PLUS (Grad PLUS) loans and the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) Program. In addition to Federal Stafford loans, the majority of health professions students rely on Grad PLUS loans to finance their education. Limits to Grad PLUS loans would force students to take out private loans, which typically have higher interest rates and limited repayment options. This creates an additional barrier to entry, especially for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Federal financial aid policies should work to encourage and allow all students - regardless of their socioeconomic status - to pursue health professions careers.

The PSLF Program is a critical tool to retain and recruit the health professions workforce and increases access to health care, particularly in rural and urban medically underserved communities, where shortages are more severe. Many health professions students take on significant debt, and if they pursue a career in public service – such as working in federally qualified health centers or in primary care serving vulnerable patients – they forgo potentially

higher lifelong, career earnings. This program helps assist health professions students pursue their passion for working in communities in need while being able to receive loan relief.

Healthcare workforce shortages have impacted virtually every community across the nation; however, for people living in rural areas of the U.S., staff shortages do not just lead to longer wait times for appointments, they can lead to the closing of health care offices and clinics, which for many people living in these rural regions are the only source of health care access for miles. Research shows that the location of health care education and training directly impacts practice location. Therefore, it is imperative that Congress increase investment for health care workforce training in rural and underserved areas.

Additionally, student loan debt is a major obstacle to those seeking careers in governmental public health, due to low-paying, entry-level jobs that are available in health departments. Loan repayment will allow our nation to strengthen the capacity of the public health workforce with the next generation of professionals who have educational training in public health and related disciplines. The Public Health Workforce Loan Repayment Program is a vital program to help public health graduates make significant contributions to advance the field of public health practice, particularly in preparation for the next public health crisis. We are grateful for congressional action to reauthorize this program through the PREVENT Pandemics Act, but urge adequate funding to make a real impact.

Finally, efforts to expand institutional aid through existing federal programs, such as Title VII and Title VIII health care workforce programs, and provide additional grants to HBCUs, TCUs, and MSIs, can expand and enhance educational programs in health care fields, create a more diverse workforce, and support the health care needs of all communities. This ongoing investment should remain a top priority as Congress looks to support our health care professions.

We invite you to utilize FASHP as a resource if you have any questions about health professions education and training. Furthermore, if you are interested in connecting with health professions schools or programs in your state or district, FASHP members are available to assist you at any time. For additional information, please contact Andrew Herrin at Andrew@Lewis-Burke.com.

Thank you for your time and we look forward to working with you on these important issues in the 118th Congress.

Sincerely,

Federation of Associations of Schools of the Health Professions

*American Association of Colleges of Nursing
American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine
American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy
American Association of Colleges of Podiatric Medicine
American Council of Academic Physical Therapy
American Dental Education Association
American Occupational Therapy Association*

American Physical Therapy Association
American Psychological Association
Association of Accredited Naturopathic Medical Colleges
Association of American Medical Colleges
Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges
Association of Chiropractic Colleges
Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry
Association of Schools Advancing Health Professions
Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health
Association of University Programs in Health Administration
Council on Social Work Education
PA Education Association

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- [1] <https://nam.edu/burnout-among-health-care-professionals-a-call-to-explore-and-address-this-underrecognized-threat-to-safe-high-quality-care/>
- [2] <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6367114/>