

Nurse Student Loan Forgiveness Program FAQs

From where did this student loan forgiveness program originate?

This program was part of the Nurse and Patient Safety Act that passed during this year's legislative session. The program was originally part of the Keeping Nurses at the Bedside Act (KNABA), a bill designed by MNA nurses and elected officials to help address the nurse staffing crisis in Minnesota. While KNABA did not pass in its full form, parts of the bill were pulled out and made up the contents of the Nurse and Patient Safety Act (NAPSA).

What is the Student Loan Forgiveness Program and who qualifies?

This student loan forgiveness program was designed specifically by MNA members to help retain Registered Nurses in the hospital setting at the bedside.

If I apply, am I guaranteed to get loan forgiveness?

No, not all who apply will be selected. The number of people selected is based on available funding. Applications will be scored and reviewed by an independent panel of reviewers.

What are the eligibility criteria for hospital RNs?

- Must be employed by and working in a hospital in MN, excluding for-profit hospitals
- Must be licensed and working by March 31, 2024
- Must be working in direct patient care
- Excludes outpatient surgical center RNs and those working in clinics associated with hospitals
- Owe more than \$6,000 in student loan debt

What loans are eligible for repayment under the program guidelines?

The loan forgiveness program provides funds for repayment of qualifying educational loans for actual costs paid for tuition, reasonable education and living expenses related to the graduate or undergraduate education of the nurse. Qualified loans may include:

- Government loans (Subsidized, Unsubsidized, GradPLUS)
- Private Loans (Sallie Mae, MN SELF, Discover Student Loan, etc.)
- Not eligible- ParentPLUS Loan, loans in default, personal loans, student loans consolidated with non-student loans

What is included in the online application process?

You will be asked to submit a resume, student loan statements, an essay, and at least two references with one being someone who directly supervised you. Professors, preceptors, charge nurses, and other supervisors are all acceptable references. References cannot be peers, friends, parents, clergy, and classmates.

What should I focus on in the essay portion of my application?

Your essay should describe your connection to your community as a healthcare provider, explain why you care about the setting where you practice and would like to continue serving patients there, and share how your experiences will affect healthcare outcomes for your patients.

What is the service obligation?

- Minimum 2-year / maximum 4-year obligation
- 30 hours per week for at least 45 weeks per year (this is an average) in direct patient care
- Providing direct patient care/client-centered services. Hours cannot be fulfilled meeting with providers, process improvement, policy development, supervising, or administering programs
- Not retroactive—previous work is not counted

What is the amount of funding I could receive?

Nurses who are approved will receive \$6,000 for the first year, with the possibility of renewing for 3 additional years, totaling \$24,000 for a 4-year commitment. The size of the award is determined using 15% of the average educational debt in the field. The award amount cannot exceed the amount of student loan debt. At this point, the MN legislature only funded the program for two years. If you want this program to continue and receive higher levels of funding, come advocate at the MN Capitol during the next legislative session!

My weekly schedule changes—some weeks I work 28 hours, some weeks I work 32 hours—am I eligible?

Maybe. If you can meet the average of 30 hours/week for 45 weeks per year for the length of the service commitment you would be eligible. Your employer needs to verify your hours at the end of each contract year, if hours are not met you will need to repay all funds.

Can I take a leave of absence during my service contract? For example, for maternity/paternity leave or due to job layoff?

Yes, the MN Department of Health will pause your contract for up to 12 months and then add the time to the end of your contract, extending your end date. However, you want to notify them as soon as possible to work out the details so you are not at risk of paying the grant back.

Can I change jobs or job sites during the contract?

Yes, if your new role and site meet the program eligibility requirements. Notify the Minnesota Department of Health of any possible changes as soon as possible to ensure you remain eligible.

Do I have to report anything as part of this agreement?

Yes. Annually at the end of each contract year, the MN Department of Health requires participants to verify their employment and document that they have applied the loan forgiveness funds to their student loans.

What happens if I don't fulfill the obligations laid out in the contract?

If you do not fulfill the obligations of the contract, you will be required to repay the TOTAL amount the MN Department of Health paid plus interest at 7.5%. In cases of extenuating circumstances, this repayment may be waived by applying to the Commissioner of Health for loan discharge.

When will decisions be made?

All applicants will receive an email whether they are selected or not, by February 2024. You may need to check your spam or junk mail.

If I am not selected, can I reapply?

Yes, the legislature has funded the program for two years. Nurses will have at least one additional round of funding opportunities.

When is the application deadline?

October 6, 2023

If I have questions, who should I contact?

Please contact your MNA Labor Relations Specialist with any questions.

Where do I go to apply?

Go to the Grants Portal: <https://www.grantinterface.com/Home/Logon?urlkey=mdh>.

1. Click "Create an Account"

2. Once you have created an account, you will be taken to a dashboard where you will be able to complete the online application. The application and supporting documents will all be submitted in the portal. You can save the application at any time and come back to finish it later. You will receive a confirmation email once the application is submitted.

I'm unhappy with the implementation of this program. What should I do?

- Legislators listen to those who show up. If you want to see changes to this or other programs...
- Come to the Minnesota Capitol during MNA Day on the Hill and other legislative lobbying days to advocate for changes to the program and increased funding from the legislature.
- Write, call, and meet with your legislators to tell them why this program is important and to ask for changes.
- Talk with other registered nurses about joining you in these activities.

The more nurses at the Capitol, the more power MNA has to push for meaningful legislative changes and policy!

