

# **Rhode Island Primary Care Educational Loan Repayment Program Frequently Asked Questions**

1. What is The Rhode Island Primary Care Educational Loan Repayment Program?
  - a. The Rhode Island Primary Care Educational Loan Repayment program is being established to ensure a stable and adequate supply of primary care physicians to meet the health care needs of Rhode Islanders. The program is a collaborative effort of Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island (BCBSRI), Rhode Island Area Health Education Center (AHEC), the Rhode Island Foundation, the Rhode Island Medical Society, and the Rhode Island Student Loan Authority. The physician program is funded by a grant by BCBSRI. The RI Student Loan Authority, as administrator, will make loan repayment awards in exchange for service commitments by health care physicians. Loan repayment recipients must have outstanding educational debt acquired in pursuit of an undergraduate or graduate degree from an accredited college or university that exceeds the amount of the loan repayment award.
  
2. Who is eligible for primary care physician loan repayment?
  - a. Licensed Physicians (MDs or DOs) who will practice in Rhode Island and work in the following disciplines are eligible:
    - i. Family Medicine
    - ii. Internal Medicine
    - iii. Pediatrics
  
3. Will the programs serve other medical professionals besides physicians?
  - a. Yes, however only the physician component of the program is open for applications at this time. We expect to announce programs to serve other professional groups such as physician assistants, nurse practitioners, and others early in 2010. The scope of these programs will be dependent on funding.
  
4. Are there any factors that would make one ineligible, even if one practices in the eligible disciplines?
  - a. Yes; those with current service obligations such as National Health Service Corps (NHSC), and/or loan repayment contractual obligations from other sources, physicians holding J-1 visa waivers or those who are not US citizens or those that hold permanent resident status are ineligible. Green card holders are eligible. Those in a “solo” practice are not eligible, as well.
  
5. How is the service area defined for the program?
  - a. The eligible service area is the entire state of Rhode Island

6. How many hours each week must a physician provide clinical services to patients to be eligible:
  - a. Eligible physicians must provide an average of 32 hours of direct patient care per week during each year of service.
  
7. What is the expected award amount for eligible physicians?
  - a. Awards up to \$20,000 per year up to a maximum of 4 years. Maximum award up to \$80,000 based on level of debt. Awards go directly to pay educational loans, and awards may be enhanced by local or employer matching funds. Award cannot exceed candidate's level of debt.
  
8. Do loan repayment recipients have to pay taxes on any award?
  - a. Yes, RI Educational Loan Repayment awards are considered taxable income, and will be reported on tax form 1099 and reported to the IRS.
  
9. What is the service obligation for loan repayment recipients?
  - a. One year of service per year of funding for up to 4 years is expected. Service award will be defined in the award contract. There is no credit for practice prior to contract and no credit for practice while in school or in training. Additionally, no credit for leave of absence, although the committee may consider a stipulation that if a total of sick, holiday, vacation and CME time exceeds 45 days in any award year that days over 45 are added to requirement. Recipients who take a leave of absence will have to extend the service contract end date.
  
10. How do I find out what student loans I have?
  - a. You can obtain information regarding your Title IV loans (Federal Loans) by logging on to [www.nslds.ed.gov](http://www.nslds.ed.gov) You will need your FAFSA PIN. If you have forgotten your pin, you can obtain a new pin at [www.pin.ed.gov](http://www.pin.ed.gov).
  - b. You can obtain information regarding your Private/Alternative loans by requesting a free credit report at [www.annualcreditreport.com](http://www.annualcreditreport.com).
  
11. Does one have to apply annually?
  - a. Successful applicants may be awarded loan repayment funds for a maximum of 4 years, however to continue receiving loan forgiveness the applicant must be recertified as meeting the employment and practice criteria every 12 months during that four year period.
  
12. Are there any specific patient care policies that are required to be eligible to receive an award?

- a. Yes, eligible physicians must provide care regardless of patient's ability to pay, accept patients with coverage under Medicare, Medicaid or other state-funded health care benefit program
13. What happens if one does not complete the required term of service after receiving an award and signing a contract?
- a. Awardees must repay proportional to unserved period, plus collection costs, if any, in the year in which award was provided.
14. What will be the prioritization of awards?
- a. Program objectives and selection criteria are established by RIF, BCBSRI, the RI Medical Society, the RI AHEC Program and the RI Student Loan Authority, in accordance with RI laws. Factors may include local goals for improved service; previous difficulty in recruitment and/or retention; the individual risk of leaving the community; applicant educational loan debt level; number of hours worked by the applicant each week; or other parameters such as those areas which are underserved with special consideration for RI's most underserved and undersupplied areas. If awarded funds, each recipient is encouraged 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 is viewed favorably in future applications.
15. What group will be making the final decision on who receives the loan forgiveness awards?
- a. Rhode Island Primary Care Educational Loan Repayment Committee will be making final decisions on who is awarded loan repayment.
16. When will the decision be made and the applicants notified?
- a. Candidates will be notified within 4 weeks of a decision from time of application. Application deadline is 1/30/2010.