

Pediatric Subspecialty Loan Repayment

Title VII Health Professions programs administered by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA)

Background | Pediatric Subspecialty Shortage

There is a severe shortage of pediatric rheumatologists in the United States, with fewer than 350 board-certified, practicing pediatric rheumatologists, primarily clustered in and around large cities. Startlingly, 8 states have no pediatric rheumatologist and 5 states have only one. As a result, the over 300,000 patients with juvenile rheumatic diseases have limited access to the care and treatment they need:

- Only 25% of children with arthritis are currently able to see a pediatric rheumatologist; • The workforce is aging, with the average pediatric rheumatologist in his or her early-to-mid 50s;
- A child with rheumatic disease must travel an average of 57 miles to be seen by a pediatric rheumatologist – more than double the average number of miles for other pediatric subspecialties.

Access to pediatric rheumatologists is important for a variety of reasons:

- Early diagnosis/treatment is critical for disease management, and it can be difficult for providers untrained in pediatric rheumatology to diagnose arthritis.
- Pediatricians tend not to be adequately trained to care for children with juvenile arthritis, while adult rheumatologists are not trained to deal with pediatric issues – whether it be the stunted bone growth that can result from arthritis and its treatment, or the special requirements of providing treatment to an adolescent.
- Treatment of arthritis is complex and there are many potential co-morbidities and related diseases, such as uveitis and TMJ disorders.
- Access to a pediatric rheumatologist increases access to novel therapies, including therapies that are only available in clinical trials

WHAT CONGRESS CAN DO

The Senate is currently working to renew the Title VII Health Professions programs administered by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). These programs provide education and training opportunities in high-need disciplines and settings and provide financial aid to health professions students. One of the Title VII programs is the Pediatric Subspecialty Loan Repayment Program (PSLRP, Section 775 of the Public Health Service Act), a program that would provide \$35,000 in loan repayment per year for up to three years in exchange for practicing in an underserved area. This program was originally authorized in 2010 but was never funded by Congress before its authorization lapsed in 2014.

The Senate Health, Education, Labor & Pensions (HELP) Committee is working to advance its own Title VII reauthorization bill in the coming weeks, and we are urging them to include an authorization level for the Pediatric Subspecialty Loan Repayment Program in the bill. There has been a recognition of the importance of policies to address pediatric subspecialty shortages, and it is important to build support among senators for this important provision. Last year, the House of Representatives advanced its own Title VII reauthorization bill, which unfortunately did not include a reauthorization for PSLRP. Securing an authorization for funding for this program in the Senate bill is a necessary step to ensuring this program is included in the final legislative package passed by Congress.

Loan repayment for pediatric subspecialists would reduce the overall loan burden from training and has the potential to encourage more pediatric subspecialists to practice in rural and underserved communities, connecting more families with appropriate subspecialists. More than 50 public health and medical organizations have urged Congress to include a reauthorization of loan repayment for pediatric subspecialists in the Title VII Health Professions reauthorization because the program would help provide children with timely access to important health services, no matter their health condition or ZIP code.

CONTACT YOUR SENATORS

By Phone

- Hello. I am from [your state] and I am an Advocate for the 300,000 American children living with juvenile arthritis. I am calling today to urge [Senator's name] to support a reauthorization of loan repayment for pediatric subspecialists (Section 775 of the Public Health Service Act).
- [Personalize with information about your arthritis story, and why this issue is important to you]
- Across the country, there are significant shortages of pediatric subspecialists and child and adolescent psychiatrists, which lead to long commutes for parents seeking care for their children and appointment wait times that can last more than 10 weeks. For a child with a complex, serious health condition like arthritis 10 weeks can seem like a lifetime and can be all the time takes for permanent joint damage to occur.
- There are many causes for these pediatric subspecialty workforce shortages, but the additional investment in time and money to become a subspecialist is a major driver.
- The Pediatric Subspecialty Loan Repayment Program would provide \$35,000 in loan repayment per year for up to three years in exchange for practicing in an underserved area. This helps to address the current shortage and geographic disparities that impact a child's ability to access the subspecialty care he or she needs.
- The program would incentivize pediatricians to pursue subspecialties because it reduces the overall loan burden from training and would encourage more pediatric subspecialists to practice in rural and underserved communities, connecting more families with needed subspecialists.
- The Senate has the opportunity to reauthorize this program as part of the reauthorization of the Title VII Health Professions programs.
- Please consider supporting a reauthorization of the Pediatric Subspecialty Loan Repayment Program in the Senate's Title VII Health Professions reauthorization bill to reduce critical shortages of pediatric subspecialists.
- Thank you for all you do for children.

By Email

As an Advocate for Arthritis, I urge you to support a reauthorization of loan repayment for pediatric subspecialists (Section 775 of the Public Health Service Act) in order to help provide children with timely access to important health services, no matter their health condition or ZIP code.

Across the country, there are significant shortages of pediatric subspecialists and child and adolescent psychiatrists, which lead to long commutes for parents seeking care for their children and appointment wait times that can last more than 10 weeks. For a child with a complex, serious health condition, 10 weeks can seem like a lifetime.

[\[Share your personal story here\]](#)

There is also a significant disparity in the geographic distribution of pediatric subspecialists across the country to treat these children, resulting in many children in underserved rural and urban areas not receiving timely health care. Children with complex medical conditions warranting subspecialty care are among the most vulnerable; their ability to see the right doctor in a reasonable amount of time should not be determined by where they live.

There are a number of barriers to subspecialty training, including two to three years of additional training during which interest accrues on medical school debt and trainees forgo a salary for a smaller stipend. Even after training, pediatric subspecialists often earn less than general pediatricians.

The Pediatric Subspecialty Loan Repayment Program would provide \$35,000 in loan repayment per year for up to three years in exchange for practicing in an underserved area, helping to address in part the economic disincentives individuals face that can discourage them from subspecializing. This program would help address the shortage and geographic disparities that impact a child's ability to access the subspecialty care he or she needs.

The Senate has the opportunity to reauthorize this program as part of the reauthorization of the Title VII Health Professions programs reauthorization.

Please consider supporting a reauthorization of the Pediatric Subspecialty Loan Repayment Program in the Senate's Title VII Health Professions reauthorization bill to reduce critical shortages of pediatric subspecialists.

Thank you for all you do for children.