

ARKANSAS RURAL MEDICAL PRACTICE STUDENT LOAN AND SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

As amended by Act 1114 of 1995, Act 1257 of 1995, Act 676 of 2003, Act 1058 of 2007, Act 708 of 2009, Act 132 of 2017

Information for Recipients Signing Contracts on or after December 01, 2017

WHAT IS THE GOAL OF THE PROGRAM? To increase the number of physicians practicing medicine in rural communities in Arkansas; by allowing students who receive rural practice loans during medical school to have these loans converted to scholarship grants by practicing full-time primary care medicine in a rural community in Arkansas.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO APPLY? Any bona fide resident of Arkansas who is enrolled, or accepted for admission, (including Alternates) at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences College of Medicine. Each applicant must be interviewed and approved by the Arkansas Rural Medical Practice Student Loan and Scholarship Board.

MAY ALTERNATES APPLY? Alternates on the waiting list for acceptance to the College of Medicine may apply. The Board will interview each applicant who submits a Rural Practice contract to determine if he/she meets the eligibility requirements. If the Board approves the application (pending the availability of funds) he/she will be elevated to the top of the Alternate List. This does not guarantee admission to medical school. If a position in the freshman class becomes available, Alternates signing Rural Practice Loan contracts will be considered for admission in the order in which they were originally ranked by the College of Medicine Admissions Committee. The Board has determined that Alternates who are approved for the Rural Practice program, advanced on the Alternate List, and subsequently admitted to medical school, cannot defer admission to medical school but must complete all pre-matriculation requirements as stipulated on their AMCAS application and enroll in the freshman class for the year in which they are admitted to medical school.

WHAT FUNCTION DOES THE RURAL PRACTICE BOARD PERFORM? (1) determines eligibility of applicants for loans, (2) names recipients of such assistance, (3) sets the amounts of loans, (4) all disbursements and collections, (5) grants special provisions, and (6) makes compliance and non-compliance determinations.

WHAT OTHER QUALIFICATIONS MUST APPLICANTS MEET? An applicant must be a person of good moral character, of good academic standing, in need of financial assistance to complete medical studies, participating in a "medically underserved and rural practice curriculum", and who clearly demonstrates a desire to practice full-time primary care medicine in a rural community.

WHAT IS A MEDICALLY UNDERSERVED COMMUNITY? Act 1058 of 2007 defines "medically underserved" as an area the Board determines to have unmet needs for medical services due to factors including and without limitation: the ratio of primary care physicians to population and the infant mortality rate; the percentage of population with incomes below the federal poverty level; resident individuals 60 and older; physicians 60 and older; accessibility within the area to primary care medicine; and other relevant criteria the Board may deem necessary.

WHAT IS A QUALIFIED COMMUNITY? Act 132 of 2017 defines a qualified community is one that is less than 20,000 in population, according to the latest national census, and more than 20 miles from a community of more than 20,000 in population.

HOW IS 'PRIMARY CARE' DEFINED? Family Medicine, general Internal Medicine, general Pediatrics, general Internal Medicine/Pediatrics, general Obstetrics/Gynecology, General Surgery, Emergency Medicine and Geriatrics (added in 2009).

DO I HAVE TO NAME THE COMMUNITY IN WHICH I WILL PRACTICE AT THE TIME I APPLY FOR A LOAN? NO. You are simply making a promise to practice full-time primary care medicine in a qualified rural community in Arkansas. You do not have to decide on a rural community until you complete residency training.

HOW MUCH MAY I BORROW? Depending upon the availability of funds, a student could receive up to \$16,500 per academic year. At present, funding for the program can only support \$12,000 per academic year.

CAN THESE LOANS BE RENEWED? YES, by making application each year before the Board--provided that funds are available and the student continues to meet all of the eligibility requirements. For Alternates who gain admission to medical school by virtue of being approved for the Rural Practice Program, he/she must remain in the program for all four years of medical school. He/she will have a four year obligation to practice in a rural community.

HOW ARE RURAL PRACTICE LOANS REPAID? Each applicant approved by the Board for a loan shall practice full-time primary care medicine in a rural community. For each continuous whole year of full-time medical practice, the Board shall cancel, by converting to a scholarship grant, the full amount of one year's loan plus accrued interest. Loans made for subsequent years will be converted in like manner, one year of service for each year of assistance, until the loan obligation is retired.

WHAT PROVISION IS ALLOWED FOR INTERNSHIP AND RESIDENCY TRAINING? Following graduation, a recipient is allowed one year of medical internship and no more than four additional years of primary care residency training. The residency training program must include practice experience in a rural community and must be approved in advance by the Board. Requests for deferment of payment must be approved by the Board on an annual basis. Allowance is made for involuntary military service.

WHAT HAPPENS TO MY LOAN(S) IN THE EVENT OF DEATH? All loans unpaid shall be due and payable.

WHAT HAPPENS IN THE EVENT A RECIPIENT DEFAULTS ON HIS/HER OBLIGATION? The recipient remains obligated to repay loans received, together with interest at the maximum rate allowed by Arkansas law, or 5% above the federal discount rate, whichever is less. Interest accrues from the date each loan check was received. Repayment shall be due and payable in full when it is determined that the recipient is not in compliance with the provisions of the contractual agreement. Other penalties apply to Alternates who, if interviewed and approved by the Rural Practice Board, are advanced to the top of the Alternate List and subsequently admitted to medical school.

IS IT TRUE THAT LEGISLATION STIPULATES MY LICENSE MAY BE SUSPENDED TO PRACTICE MEDICINE IN THE STATE OF ARKANSAS IF I DEFAULT ON MY RURAL PRACTICE LOAN? YES! State law stipulates that the recipient of a rural medical practice loan or loans shall bindingly contract that not engaging in the practice of medicine in accordance with the loan contract may result in the suspension of his or her license to practice medicine in Arkansas. The suspension shall be for a period of years equivalent to the number of years that the recipient is obligated to practice medicine in a rural community and the suspension shall continue until the loan, with interest, is paid in full.

ONE FINAL WORD OF CAUTION . . .

Life is full of choices. Most of the time we make good choices and sometimes we make bad choices, but nevertheless we must live with the consequences of our choices. With regard to signing a rural practice contract, you have a choice. You are making a commitment, before one day of medical school, which will obligate you for at least the next eleven years: *four years of medical school, plus a minimum of three years for a primary care residency training program, plus four years of full time practice in a medically underserved rural community in Arkansas.*

Things will change over the next seven years between the time you begin medical school, complete residency training, and choose a community where you will reside and practice. Please understand your decision to sign a contract to practice in a medically underserved rural community in Arkansas is separate and independent of any employment opportunities. The contract with the state of Arkansas does not guarantee employment, a clinic, an income guarantee or salary. However, that will not change your moral obligation (your word) and your legal obligation (your contract). There are far reaching consequences if you choose to sign a contract and default on your moral and legal obligation--including the **suspension of your license** to practice medicine in Arkansas.

The choice is yours. No one is forcing you to make this decision. You are voluntarily making the decision to practice fulltime primary care medicine in a medically underserved rural community in Arkansas. This is a great scholarship program which will greatly minimize your medical school educational indebtedness while helping to meet the healthcare needs of rural Arkansans for generations to come. The choice is yours. We just want you to be absolutely sure that the choice you make is a decision you can live with over the next eleven years.