

PROVIDE FINANCIAL RELIEF FOR RESIDENTS

THE ISSUE:

Medical education debt has reached an alarming level, with the average medical student carrying \$215K in debt upon graduation. In addition to undergraduate studies and four years of medical school, aspiring cardiologists must complete a residency (typically three years) and a cardiology fellowship (typically three years), with potential additional training for any subspecialties pursued. Currently, student loan interest continues to accrue during this multi-year training period.

Cardiovascular trainees, like their peers in other specialties, face rigorous residency and fellowship programs that require long hours and significant personal sacrifices, all while earning modest stipends that do not reflect their eventual contributions to the health care system. Additionally, the **One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA)** included provisions that cap the amount of federal unsubsidized loans a medical student may obtain in any academic year at \$50K and set the maximum aggregate limit for federal professional-degree unsubsidized loans at \$200K.

Many young clinicians experience financial hardship, limiting their career choices and discouraging them from pursuing certain specialties or practice settings – such as academic medicine or underserved communities – where their expertise is needed most.

ACC'S POSITION:

Through legislation such as the **Resident Education Deferred Interest (REDI) Act** (H.R. 2028/S. 942), Congress can help reduce financial stress for physicians during the internship or residency phases of their careers, allowing them to concentrate on their medical training and patient care instead of accumulating debt. Specifically, the legislation would allow interest-free deferment of student loans during medical internships or residencies.

Demand for cardiovascular clinicians is growing across the country; nearly half of U.S. counties currently lack a cardiologist. The U.S. is projected to face a shortage of 7,270 cardiologists by 2038. It is crucial to ensure financial stability for those who will be responsible for safeguarding heart health for Americans across the country. The **REDI Act** represents a pragmatic and necessary step toward creating a more sustainable and equitable medical education system.

ACC'S ASK:

Cosponsor and support the **REDI Act** (H.R. 2028/S. 942) introduced by **Sens. John Boozman (R-AR)** and **Jacky Rosen (D-NV)** in the U.S. Senate and **Reps. Brian Babin, DDS, (R-TX)** and **Chrissy Houlahan (D-PA)** in the U.S. House.

KEY TAKEAWAYS



According to the American Association of Medical Colleges, medical school graduates in 2025 graduated with an average debt of \$215K. This represents an increase of 5% compared to 2024.



The **OBBBA** included provisions capping lifetime borrowing limits for professional programs at \$200K.



The National Center for Healthcare Workforce Analysis projects the U.S. will face a shortage of 7,270 cardiologists by 2038.



Nearly half of all U.S. counties and 86.2% of rural counties do not have a cardiologist.

PROTECT ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE LOANS FOR THE CV CARE TEAM

THE ISSUE:

The **OBBBA** established new caps on federal student loans, introducing higher borrowing limits for professional degrees (\$50K annually; \$200K lifetime) compared to graduate degrees (\$20,500 annually; \$100K lifetime). Following these structural changes, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) finalized a rule that classified post-baccalaureate nursing degrees as graduate degrees, subjecting nursing students to the lower annual and lifetime loan limits.

As a result, current nursing students may face unexpected financing gaps and be forced to rely on higher-cost private loans to complete their education. At the same time, prospective students may be deterred from pursuing advanced nursing degrees altogether as reduced access to federal loans increases the financial barrier to entry. Together, these changes could exacerbate nursing shortages at a time when access to care depends on a strong nursing workforce.

ACC'S POSITION:

Providing the highest level of patient care is reliant upon the entire cardiovascular care team. New bipartisan legislation, the **Nursing is a Professional Degree Act** (H.R. 8691/S. 4568), has been introduced which would reclassify post-baccalaureate nursing degrees (MSN, DNP, DNAP or PhD) as professional degrees, ensuring students in these advanced nursing programs can access the higher loan limits.

ACC'S ASK:

Cosponsor and support the **Nursing is a Professional Degree Act** (H.R. 8691/S. 4568) introduced by **Sens. Jeff Merkley (D-OR), Roger Wicker (R-MS), Cynthia Lumis (R-WY), Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), and Susan Collins (R-ME)** in the U.S. Senate and **Reps. Jennifer Kiggans (R-VA), David Joyce (R-OH), Jack Bergman (R-MI), Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA), and Don Bacon (R-NE)** in the U.S. House.

KEY TAKEAWAYS



A recent ED rule reclassified post-baccalaureate nursing programs as graduate-level degrees, resulting in reduced borrowing options for these students.



Reclassifying these degrees as "professional" degrees allows students access to higher loan limits, providing ample options to finance their continued education.



The American Association of Colleges of Nursing reported a 3% decrease in enrollment in PhD programs in 2025, marking the 11th consecutive year of declining enrollment.



Loan caps do not account for the differing cost of tuition or living expenses at various programs.