

March 5, 2024

Carole Johnson, MA  
Administrator  
Health Resources and Services Administration  
5600 Fishers Lane  
Rockville, MD 20852

Dear Administrator Johnson:

Our organizations write to you today about the implementation of the Pediatric Subspecialty Loan Repayment Program (PSLRP). We greatly appreciate the work of the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) to issue the first-ever PSLRP awards last year, and to work with provider organizations to address some of the challenges that applicants faced with last year's application process. As you know, this important program was created to address the serious shortages of pediatric medical subspecialists, pediatric surgical specialists, and pediatric mental health providers across the United States, which directly impact access to equitable care for children, especially those with serious, chronic or complex health care needs.

We are pleased that HRSA is considering ways to ensure that this year's application requirements – including provider clinical hours and employment site eligibility requirements – reflect how pediatric subspecialty care is practiced and the regionalization of pediatric specialty care. We look forward to continuing to collaborate with your team on workable solutions to these issues.

At the same time, we are concerned that pediatric medical subspecialists, pediatric surgical specialists, and child and adolescent psychiatrists were underrepresented in the final awardee pool. According to the data we have seen, HRSA received 836 eligible applications from physicians, but offered loan repayment awards to only 34 (out of 122 total awards offered) — a 4.1% award rate.

**Therefore, as HRSA looks forward to its second round of applications for this program in the summer of 2024, we urge you to adopt application selection criteria that ensures that providers with high graduate debt can benefit equally from this important program.** In order to encourage physicians to undergo pediatric specialty training, policies must recognize the unique financial disincentives to participating in pediatric subspecialty fellowships after having already completed medical school and 3-5 years of residency.

When Congress enacted this important program, its intent was to address the significant shortages facing pediatric medical subspecialists, pediatric surgical specialists, and child and adolescent psychiatrists, as well as the shortages facing other pediatric mental health professionals. These shortages continue and are impeding access to care for children with serious physical and mental health needs in underserved areas.

Without a sufficient federal investment in the workforce of pediatric medical subspecialists, pediatric surgical specialists, and child and adolescent psychiatrists, children will continue to face long wait times for subspecialty care, need to travel long distances to receive that care, or go without care altogether. We ask for your urgent attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,

Academic Pediatric Association  
American Academy of Dermatology Association  
American Academy of Neurology  
American Academy of Pediatrics  
American Association for Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus  
American Association of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry  
American Association of Orthopaedic Surgeons  
American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology  
American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists  
American College of Rheumatology  
American Pediatric Society  
American Society of Pediatric Hematology/Oncology  
American Society of Pediatric Nephrology  
American Academy of Ophthalmology  
Arthritis Foundation  
Association of Medical School Pediatric Department Chairs  
Association of Pediatric Program Directors  
Association of University Professors of Ophthalmology  
Boston Children's Hospital  
California Children's Hospital Association  
Child Neurology Society  
Children's Hospital Association  
Children's Hospital Los Angeles  
Children's Wisconsin  
Council of Pediatric Subspecialties  
MultiCare Mary Bridge Children's Hospital  
Nemours Children's Health  
North American Society for Pediatric and Adolescent Gynecology  
North American Society for Pediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition

Pediatric Endocrine Society

Pediatric Infectious Diseases Society

Pediatric Orthopaedic Society of North America

Pediatric Policy Council

Phoenix Children's

Scoliosis Research Society

Societies for Pediatric Urology

Society for Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics

Society for Pediatric Research

The Society of Thoracic Surgeons