



American Academy of
Addiction Psychiatry

Translating Science. Transforming Lives.

400 Massasoit Ave., Suite 108
East Providence, RI 02914
401 524-3076 www.aap.org

February 26, 2026

The Honorable Linda McMahon
Secretary
Department of Education
400 Maryland Ave, SW
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Secretary McMahon,

On behalf of Addiction Psychiatrists working daily to address the nation's substance use and mental health crises, we write to express serious concern regarding proposed regulations, Reimagining and Improving Student Education (Docket ID ED-2025-OPE-0944), to eliminate the Graduate PLUS loan program and cap federal loan repayment for professionals.

While we appreciate ongoing efforts to reimagine and improve professional education, these proposed changes risk unintended and far-reaching consequences for the substance use disorder and co-occurring mental health workforce, particularly in high-need specialties such as Addiction Psychiatry.

Addiction Psychiatry faces a well-documented and worsening workforce shortage. At a time when overdose deaths and substance use disorders continue to affect millions of Americans, the pipeline of physicians trained to diagnose and treat these complex conditions remains dangerously limited. Addiction psychiatrists complete four years of medical school, four years of psychiatry residency, and additional fellowship training—often accruing substantial educational debt along the way. It is not uncommon for early-career physicians to carry \$250,000–\$400,000 or more in student loan debt.

Board of Directors

Timothy Fong, MD
President

John Mariani, MD
Immediate Past President

Larissa Mooney, MD
Chair, Past Presidents Council

Rebecca Payne, MD
President Elect

Kevin Gray, MD
Vice President

Carol Weiss, MD
Treasurer

Jose Vito, MD
Secretary

Elie Aoun, MD
Member at Large

Kevin Sevarino, MD, PhD
Medical Director

Kathryn Cates-Wessel
Chief Executive Officer

Alena Balasanova, MD
AMA Liaison

Adina Bowe, MD
Chair, Health Access Committee

Jennifer Creedon, MD
Chair, Youth and Adolescence Committee

Joao De Aquino, MD
Chair, Research Committee

Jeffrey DeVido, MD
APA Liaison, Council on Addiction

Danae DiRocco, MD, MPH
Chair, Membership Committee

Inbal Gafni, MD
Chair, International Committee

Talal Khan, MD
Chair, Area Directors

Frances Levin, MD
Grant Liaison

David Marcovitz, MD
Chair, Early Career Committee

Sanchit Maruti, MD
Director, Addictions and Their Treatment Course

Carla Marienfeld, MD
Chair, CPD Committee

Ismene Petrakis, MD
Editor-in-Chief, *The American Journal on Addictions*

Roopa Sethi, MD, MBBS
Chair, Education Committee

Corneliu Stanciu, MD, FAPA
Editor, AAAP Newsletter

Cardidad Ponce-Martinez, MD
Chair, Scientific Program Committee

Justine Welsh, MD
Chair, Public Policy Committee

Laurence Westreich, MD
Chair, Law and Addiction Committee

Philipa Owusu-Antwi, MD, MPH
Trainee Representative

Kathryn Renard, MD
Trainee Representative

Graduate PLUS loans have historically provided critical access to financing for medical and other graduate students whose cost of attendance exceeds standard federal loan caps. Without financing from the Graduate Plus loans program, shortages in the workforce will be exacerbated, and talented individuals will be deterred from entering the field.

Similarly, capping loan repayment options for professionals may reduce the financial feasibility of entering public service, academic medicine, Veterans Affairs systems, and community-based treatment settings—precisely where addiction psychiatrists are most urgently needed. Loan repayment flexibility is not a luxury; it is a structural support that enables clinicians to choose service-oriented careers over higher-paying subspecialties or private practice models.

We thank the Trump Administration for its commitment to addressing substance use disorders and other mental conditions and we particularly applaud efforts to expand access to evidence-based treatments. But we caution that policies that increase financial barriers to medical education may inadvertently undermine these efforts. We urge the Department to carefully consider the workforce implications of these proposals and work with Congress to make education more affordable.

We also strongly urge you to include mental health professionals such as counselors, addiction counselors, and social workers in the definition of a professional. A multidisciplinary approach has become essential to deliver efficient substance use and co-occurring mental health care; we need to ensure they continue to be available to deliver front-line care and serve rural communities that are often underserved. Excluding or devaluing these professionals within federal financial aid policy would undermine national efforts to expand access to substance use disorder and mental health treatment. Removing financial supports risks shrinking the pipeline at a time when demand for services is rising.

We respectfully request that the Department preserve accessible financing options for graduate medical education and maintain repayment structures that allow physicians and other professionals to serve in high-need communities without insurmountable financial strain.

Thank you for your consideration of these concerns and for your commitment to strengthening educational opportunities to continue to reduce the impact addiction has on individuals, families, and communities.

Sincerely,



Kathryn Cates-Wessel
Chief Executive Officer/Executive Director



Timothy W. Fong, MD
President