



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **NEW STUDENT LOAN REPAYMENT PROGRAM LAUNCHES FOR COMMUNITY BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS**

### **Illinois Student Assistance Commission Partners with Illinois Department of Human Services, Division of Mental Health, to Provide Loan Repayment Assistance to Eligible Borrowers**

CHICAGO – The [Illinois Student Assistance Commission \(ISAC\)](#) has launched the application for a student loan repayment assistance program to support qualified mental health and substance abuse professionals. The [Community Behavioral Health Care Professional Loan Repayment Program](#) is designed as an incentive for recruitment and retention of those who practice in underserved or rural areas.

While the Program was approved by the General Assembly, [signed into law](#) by Governor Pritzker, and made effective in 2019, it had not previously been funded due to budget constraints. The [Illinois Department of Human Services, Division of Mental Health \(IDHS\)](#), with new funding from the State’s cannabis program, reached out to ISAC to discuss partnership, and the General Assembly and Governor approved ISAC to use up to \$5 million in funding for FY23.

“Here in Illinois, we are on a mission to make mental health care as widespread and accessible as possible—and I know that if we want to achieve that, then we must attract and retain quality community-based behavioral health care workers,” **said Governor JB Pritzker**. “Thanks to the leadership of ISAC and IDHS, we are ensuring that our behavioral health care workers have access to loan repayment assistance, so they can focus on what matters: making sure every Illinoisan—regardless of socioeconomic status or location—gets the mental health care they deserve.”

“The shortage of Illinois community-based behavioral workers creates significant disparities in access to mental health and substance abuse services, **said Grace B. Hou, Secretary, Illinois Department of Human Services**. “The goal of this program is to help recruit and retain professionals to provide these critically needed services, and we are pleased to partner with ISAC for their expertise in delivering grant, scholarship, and repayment programs.”

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“Like many professionals providing essential care services, the compensation of behavioral health workers does not necessarily align with the value that they bring to clients and communities,” **said Executive Director of ISAC Eric Zarnikow.** “As an agency focused on improving equity and access, ISAC looks forward to administering a program that can financially assist professionals providing much-needed services, and can also help ensure that rural and underserved areas get the mental health resources they need and deserve.”

The program will provide awards to eligible applicants who have outstanding balances on an eligible educational loan, to help them repay their student loan debt. The amount of the annual award is based on the applicant’s position and remaining loan balance and may be received for up to four years.

In addition to having an outstanding student loan balance, applicants must be licensed through the Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation for their eligible behavioral health profession (psychiatrist, psychologist [PhD., Psy.D.], advanced practice nurse, physician assistant, licensed clinical social worker, licensed clinical professional counselor) OR hold certification as a Certified Alcohol and Drug Counselor from the Illinois Alcoholism and Other Drug Abuse Professional Certification Association. Applicants must also have worked for at least 12 consecutive months as a behavioral health professional in a community mental health center in an underserved or rural health professional shortage area (HPSA)\* prior to application. (\*See <https://data.hrsa.gov/tools/shortage-area> for a list of HPSAs) For each year of loan repayment assistance, applicants must fulfill a separate 12-month period as a behavioral health professional in a community mental health center.

The priority application date for the 2022-23 Community Behavioral Health Care Professional Loan Repayment Program is (on or before) November 15, 2022. Applications submitted after that date will be considered for as long as funding remains available after all timely, qualified applicants have been awarded.

For additional eligibility criteria, and to apply, visit <https://www.isac.org/CommunityBehavioralHealth>. Questions? Contact the ISAC Call Center at 800.899.ISAC (4722) or [isac.studentservices@illinois.gov](mailto:isac.studentservices@illinois.gov).

### **About ISAC**

The mission of the Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC) is to provide Illinois students with information and assistance to help make education beyond high school accessible and affordable. ISAC provides comprehensive, objective, and timely information about education and financial aid for students and their families—giving them access to the tools they need to make the educational choices that are right for them. Then, through the state scholarship and grant programs ISAC administers, ISAC can help students make those choices a reality. Find us at [isac.org](https://www.isac.org) and follow us on [Facebook](#) @ILStudentAssistance, [Twitter](#), on [Instagram](#) @ISACfinaid and on [YouTube](#).

### **ABOUT IDHS**

The Department of Human Services is one of Illinois' largest agencies, with more than 13,000 employees. Illinois created IDHS in 1997, to provide our state's residents with streamlined access to integrated services, especially those who are striving to move from welfare to work and economic independence, and others who face multiple challenges to self-sufficiency. IDHS is proud of its diversity, efficiency, and the services that the agency and its community partners provide to Illinois citizens.

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