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Texas Launches Student Loan Repayment Program for Mental Health Professionals

Addressing a critical healthcare need for Texas, the new program helps mental health professionals repay their student loans if they provide care to underserved Texans.

AUSTIN, TX -- Today, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) formally launched the Loan Repayment Program for Mental Health Professionals to help expand the state's mental health workforce and improve access to mental health services in Texas. The program was created during the 84th Legislative Session by the Senate Health and Human Services Chairman, Senator Charles Schwertner, MD (R-Georgetown) and House Higher Education Chairman, Representative John Zerwas, MD (R-Katy).

"Texas needs a mental health workforce capable of meeting the growing needs of our growing state," said Schwertner. "Without an adequate number of mental health professionals, we will continue to see those experiencing mental illness cycle through our jails and emergency rooms at great expense to the taxpayer."

The new program offers student loan repayment assistance for qualified psychiatrists, psychologists, licensed professional counselors, psychiatric mental health advanced practice nurses, and clinical social workers who agree to provide direct care to underserved Texans. The legislature appropriated over \$2 million to fund the program through the 2016-2017 biennium -- an amount expected to provide over 100 new providers with two full years of loan repayment.

"The Loan Repayment Program for Mental Health Professionals is a critical piece of the overall investment made by the legislature to help solve the state's mental health crisis," said Representative Zerwas. "We must continue to work at addressing all aspects of this difficult issue that touches so many Texas families."

The shortage of mental health professionals represents one of the state's most serious healthcare challenges, as identified by both Governor Abbott's *Healthy Texas* plan and the *83rd Interim Report of the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services*.

"Helping those who struggle with mental illness is an issue very near and dear to my heart," continued Schwertner. "As someone whose mother spent over 25 years as a nurse in our state's mental health system, I know firsthand what impact a dedicated mental health professional can have on the life of someone dealing with a mental illness."

The Higher Education Coordinating Board is now accepting online applications for the Loan Repayment Program for Mental Health Professionals [on their website](#). All applications must be received by the May 6 deadline. For more information on the program, please [email the THECB](#) or call 1-800-242-3062.

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