



## Virginia Behavioral Health Loan Repayment Program (BH-LRP) Guidelines, FY25- F26

Virginia Department of Health  
Office of Health Equity



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## **A. Background, Purpose, and Priorities**

Inadequate access to mental health services is a significant problem throughout the Commonwealth. This is documented in the community health needs assessments conducted by the Virginia's nonprofit hospitals every three years. It is Virginia's rank of 19 by Mental Health America in access to behavioral health and 17th for services youth mental health (July 2024). At the same, every locality in Virginia is a federally designated as a Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas. In addition, the number of behavioral health professionals of color is disproportionately low, compared to the proportion of Virginians of color.

As a result, the 2021 General Assembly established the Virginia Behavioral Health Loan Repayment Program (*BH LRP*) to help recruit and retain licensed or certified behavioral health professionals to provide counseling and treatment to underserved Virginians in underserved areas of the Commonwealth. It has increased the funding BH LRP each year since.

In FY25, \$7,350,000 in loan repayment dollars are available for distribution to qualifying applicants who commit to the required service obligation [two years at one of the many qualifying sites] listed in the program's authorizing legislation and guidelines (see pages 6-7).

Priority will be given to eligible behavioral health professionals of color, those who speak more than one language fluently, and/or those who practice in one of Virginia's Medically Underserved Areas (MUAs) and Mental Health Shortage Areas (MHPSA) with a high need score.

First priority consideration will be given to Tier One applicants, particularly Child and Adolescent Psychiatrists (CAPs) and psychiatrists enrolled in a Virginia CAP Fellowship program, then Tier Two applicants, followed by Tier Three (see pages 4-6).

No match contribution from practice sites or the community is required.

## **B. Eligibility Requirements**

To be considered for a BH LRP award, an applicant must:

- Be an eligible behavioral health professional (*see page 4/Section C*);
- Possess a valid, unrestricted license or certification to practice as a behavioral health professional in Virginia, or be a CAP Fellow with, or eligible for, a Virginia limited fellow license (or via a multi-state licensing compact in which Virginia participates);

- Be employed at, have accepted employment, or have an offer of employment which the applicant ultimately accepts at an approved BH LRP Practice Site (see page 6/Section E)

**Or;**

- Be enrolled in a Virginia CAP Fellowship Program, have accepted an offer to enroll in a CAP Fellowship in Virginia, or have an offer for a CAP Fellowship in a Virginia CAP Programs;

**Or;**

- Work as or be offered a position that the applicant ultimately accepts, as a licensed or certified behavioral health professional, providing behavioral health treatment or counseling to underserved Virginians for 4,000 hours (equivalent to 2 years of full-time service) at an eligible site (see Section D, page 6).

**AND**

- Possess a social security number (*United States Citizen, National, Legal Permanent Resident, Political Refugee*);
- Have no other existing service obligations with other entities, including the military;
- Have no felony or misdemeanor record in Virginia or any other state;
- Be free from judgments arising from federal, state, or commercial debt(s);
- Be current on any child support payments.

### **C. Eligible Behavioral Health Professions**

- BH LRP awardees must possess or be eligible to apply for a valid and unrestricted license to practice in Virginia as one of the types of professionals listed below.
- **Note:** Awards will be contingent upon the possession of unrestricted license by the time the contract is signed.
- Tier One Providers have priority consideration, followed by Tier Two, and then Tier Three.

#### **Eligible Tier One Providers:**

- Psychiatrists;
- Child and Adolescent Psychiatrists (*CAP*)

- CAP Fellows (*limited fellow (unrestricted) license is acceptable*);
- Psychiatric-Mental Health Nurse Practitioners;
- Psychiatric Physician Assistants;
- Psychiatric Pharmacists;
- Psychiatric Registered Nurses.

### **Eligible Tier Two Providers**

- Licensed Clinical Psychologists;
  - Licensed Professional Counselors (*including Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists*);
- Licensed Clinical Social Workers.

### **Eligible Tier Three Providers (Added in FY25)**

- The Tier Three Provider types listed below are behavioral health service professionals defined in § [54.1-2400.1](#) of the *Code of Virginia*, who are not specified above as a Tier One or Tier Two Provider.
- To eligible for the BH LRP, the providers below must either possess a specialty certification in behavioral health/psychiatric services **or** be providing behavioral health related services at an eligible practice site.
- Please refer to the *Code* citation for additional details or contact [incentiveprograms@vdh.virginia.gov](mailto:incentiveprograms@vdh.virginia.gov), if you have any questions regarding your eligibility in this category.
- Licensed Practical Nurse;
- Registered Nurse;
- Certified Substance Abuse Counselor;
- Licensed Substance Abuse Treatment Practitioner;
- Professional Counselor;
- School Psychologist;
- Mental Health Professional;

- Social Worker;
- Registered Peer Recovery Specialist;
- Qualified Mental Health Professional;
- Behavioral Health Technician;
- Behavioral Health Assistant Technician;
- Art Therapy Associate/Therapist.

#### **D. Eligible Sites**

- An eligible BH LRP employer/practice site must be a public **or** a non-profit organization **or** stand-alone inpatient psychiatric facility-located in a MHPSA, Medically Underserved Area (MUA) **or** an organization meeting the BH LRP auto qualifying designation (see below).
- Eligible employers/practices include:
  - Academic Medical Centers;
  - Federally Qualified Health Centers;
  - Federal facilities providing behavioral health services (e.g. veterans' hospitals, or medical practices);
  - Free & Charitable/Hybrid Clinics;
  - Local or regional behavioral health authorities or Community Services Boards providing clinical services;
  - Non-profit organizations serving uninsured or medically underserved populations and/or communities;
  - Rural Health Clinics;
  - State Mental Health or Correctional Facilities and federal prisons;
  - Local or Regional Correctional Facilities;
  - Stand-alone inpatient psychiatric facilities serving uninsured or medically underserved populations and/or communities.

#### **E. VDH Auto Qualifying Sites**

- The employer/practice site types below automatically qualify as an eligible BH LRP employer/practice type, even if it is not located in a MHPSA or MUA.

- In addition to being in a VDH Auto qualifying site, the practitioner must provide direct patient care.
  - Academic Medical Centers;
  - Community Services Boards/local behavioral health authorities;
  - State Mental Health Hospitals;
  - State and Federal Prisons;
  - Local & Regional Jails;
  - Correctional Facilities;
  - Juvenile Detention Centers.

#### **F. Identifying Shortage Areas & Underserved Localities**

- Applicants should confirm that their employer(s)/practice site(s) is/are located in a locality designated as MHPSA or MUA by visiting the websites mentioned below and/or contacting VDH.
- This site enables users to search for MHPSA and MUAs by address: [Find Shortage Areas by Address \(hrsa.gov\)](https://data.hrsa.gov/tools/shortage-area) or by county: <https://data.hrsa.gov/tools/shortage-area>.
- Visit VDH's Office of Health Equity webpage for more information about shortage areas in Virginia (<https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/health-equity/shortage-designations-and-maps/>).
- Please contact the Office of Health Equity at [incentiveprograms@vdh.virginia.gov](mailto:incentiveprograms@vdh.virginia.gov) to determine if your employer/work site is in a MHPSA/MUA

#### **G. Employer Requirements**

- BH LRP applicants' employers are required to complete the Employer Support Form, which is submitted with the BH provider's BH LRP application <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/content/uploads/sites/76/2021/10/BH-SLRP-Provider-Support-Form-1.docx>
- This form:
  - Verifies the dates of employment, salary, and position (*for current employees*);
  - Verifies employment or Fellowship offer has been made (*for prospective employees and CAP Fellows*);

- Confirms that the applicant is in good standing, where applicable;
- Commits to employing the BH LRP applicant as a licensed or certified behavioral health professional, providing behavioral health treatment/counseling to underserved Virginians for 4,000 hours (equal to 2-years, full-time). If the applicant works less than 40 hours a week to meet the service obligation (*a minimum of 20 hours/week*), the 4,000 hours may be worked over a period of up to, but no longer than, 48 months.
- Includes an authorized signature (*Executive Director or a Human Resources Director*).
- No match contribution from employer/practice sites or the community is required.

#### **H. Available Funds and Award Amounts**

- In FY25, \$7,350,000 in loan repayment dollars are available for distribution to qualifying applicants who commit to the required service obligation (*see page 10/Section J*).
- After the initial 2-year loan repayment service obligation period, awardees can apply for up to two one-year renewals.
- Awards are contingent upon the issuance of an unrestricted Virginia license or certification or a limited fellow license or certification by the time the awardee signs a contract with VDH.
- Awards and award amounts will be made by VDH directly to the lender(s) or (approved payee) at the end of each year or service. Proof of debt reduction is required.
- The maximum BH LRP award amounts by provider type are on the following page.



Provider Type	Maximum Annual Award
<b><u>Tier 1</u></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child and Adolescent Psychiatrists (CAPs)</li> <li>• CAP Fellows</li> <li>• Psychiatrists</li> <li>• Psychiatric-Mental Health Nurse Practitioners</li> <li>• Psychiatric Physician Assistants</li> <li>• Psychiatric Pharmacists</li> <li>• Psychiatric Registered Nurses</li> </ul>	Up to 25% of total student loan debt, not to exceed <b>\$50,000</b> per year.
<b><u>Tier 2</u></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Licensed Clinical Psychologists</li> <li>• Licensed Clinical Social Workers</li> <li>• Licensed Professional Counselors (including Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists)</li> </ul>	Up to 25% of total student loan debt, not to exceed <b>\$20,000</b> per year.
<b><u>Tier 3</u></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Certified Substance Abuse Counselor;</li> <li>• License Practical Nurse;</li> <li>• Registered Nurse;</li> <li>• License Substance Abuse Treatment Practitioner;</li> <li>• Mantal Health Professional;</li> <li>• Professional Counselor;</li> <li>• Qualified Mental Health Professional;</li> <li>• Registered Peer Recovery Specialist;</li> <li>• School Psychologist;</li> <li>• Social Worker;</li> <li>• Behavioral Health Technician;</li> <li>• Behavioral Health Assistant Technician;</li> <li>• Art Therapy Associate/Therapist</li> </ul>	Up to 25% of total student loan debt, not to exceed <b>\$10,000</b> per year.

**Note:** Priority will be given to Tier One applicants, particularly Child and Adolescent Psychiatrists (CAPs) and psychiatrists enrolled in a Virginia CAP Fellowship program, followed by Tier Two applicants, and then Tier Three.

## I. Qualifying Educational Loans

- **Qualifying Lenders:** Qualifying commercial lending institutions are those subject to examination and supervision by an agency of the United States, or by the state in which the institutions have their place of business.
- **Qualifying Educational Loans:** Government and commercial loans qualify for repayment if they were issued for actual costs paid for tuition and reasonable educational and living expenses related to an awardees' undergraduate and/or graduate education to become a licensed behavioral health professional. The eligible loans must have been obtained in the BH's applicant's name.

- **Note:** For loans to be eligible for repayment, they must be free-standing and in the applicant's name only. They will not be considered if they are consolidated with other debts (*e.g. refinanced with a spouse's debt or with a home loan*).
- The following types of debt are **not eligible** for loan repayment under BH LRP:
  - Interest-only loans,
  - Loans repaid in full,
  - Credit card debt,
  - Personal lines of credit or loans,
  - Home equity or home loans,
  - Direct PLUS Loans (*loans taken out by parents on behalf of a child*),
  - Educational loans consolidated with loans owed by any other person, such as a spouse.

## **J. Service Obligations**

- BH LRP applicants/awardees must agree to work as a licensed or certified behavioral health professional (detailed on page 3-4 in Section B) for a Virginia organization providing behavioral health treatment/counseling to underserved Virginians. for 4,000 hours (*equal to 2-years, full-time*). If the applicant works less than 40 hours a week to meet the service obligation (*a minimum of 20 hours/week*), the 4,000 hours may be worked over a period of up to, but no longer than, 48 months.
- During the service commitment, the awardee's time must be devoted to direct clinical service via individual or group counseling sessions in person or via telehealth and/or telephonically and/or training prospective behavioral health licensees working in an academic medical center or possessing the credentials and approval to supervise those seeking licensure. Time spent "on-call" cannot be counted toward a service obligation for full or part- time awardees.
- Full or part-time BH LRP awardees may not be absent from work any more than 35 full-time days (280 hours) per year for vacation, sick, personal, or professional leave without obtaining a Temporary Suspension of the Service Commitment from the Virginia Department of Health.
- Questions about service obligations or to request a Temporary Suspension of the Service Commitment for family or extended medical leave should be

## K. Deferment, Cancellation, and Waivers of Service Obligation

- A written request by the awardee for a variation in the requirement for continuous engagement in full-time practice may be considered by Virginia's Commissioner of Health (*Commissioner*) in the following circumstances:
  - **Deferment of Service Obligation for Extreme Hardship:** A suspension or deferment of the awardee's BH LRP obligation may be granted at the Commissioner's discretion, for up to one year. To qualify for a temporary suspension, the awardee shall document a medical condition or personal situation that makes compliance with the obligation temporarily "impossible" or an "extreme hardship" such that enforcement would be inequitable, unconscionable, and/or immoral. Such a request must be submitted to the Commissioner in writing by the participant and with supporting documentation.
  - **Cancellation of Service Obligation:** The only permissible basis for canceling a BH LRP contract obligation is the death of the BH LRP awardee. These requests shall be submitted in the form of a letter from the deceased awardee's representative along with supporting documentation for consideration and final disposition by the Commissioner.
  - **Waiver of Service Obligation:** In rare instances, a waiver of the service obligation may be granted at the Commissioner's discretion. A waiver excuses the awardee's performance of his/her BH LRP required service commitment a personal situation exists that makes compliance with the obligation permanently "impossible" or an "extreme hardship" such that enforcement would be inequitable, unconscionable, and/or immoral. An example would be an incapacitating illness that prevents the awardee from practicing in their profession. A request for a waiver must be submitted to the Commissioner in writing by the awardee with supporting documentation.

## L. Breach of Service Commitment Obligations

- Payments will not occur, or will halt, if a BH LRP awardee breaches the service commitment obligation, unless approved by the Health Commissioner for a reason outlined in Section K (Deferment, Cancellation, and Waivers of Service Obligation).
- All loan repayments issued by VDH on the awardee's behalf before the breach must be repaid within three (3) years, with interest set at the prime rate at the date of default.
- IN ADDITION, liquidated damages must be paid, which are equal to 50% of the total amount of the loan repayment and fees paid by VDH on the awardees' behalf.

- If payment is not issued to VDH within 3 years for money owed, the debt will be considered delinquent, reported to a commercial credit reporting agency, and may be referred to a collection agency (internal/external) for follow-up.

## **M. Application Cycle**

- Applications for this program will be accepted and reviewed during the following cycle: October 15<sup>th</sup> to April 15<sup>th</sup>.
- Notice of awards will be made no later than June 15<sup>th</sup>.
- Incomplete applications will not be reviewed.

## **N. How to Apply**

- BH LRP application is available at <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/health-equity/virginia-behavioral-health-student-loan-repayment-program/>. There are seven sections to complete:

- Section 1 – General Information
- Section 2 – Required Education & Licensure
- Section 3 – Required Practice Site
- Section 4 – Eligible Educational Debt
- Section 5 – Attestation Statement
- Section 6 – Personal Statement

Completed applications must be submitted within the designated application cycle (see Section M) to be considered.

## **O. Application Process**

- Phase I: Applicant submits completed application with required attachments at any time during the application cycle.
- Phase II: Eligible and complete applications will be reviewed by and acted on by VDH.
- Phase III: Awards are issued contingent upon full execution of a BH LRP Contract and submission of any additional required documentation.

## **P. Required Documentation**

All finalized contracts will require the following documentation:

- Complete Application

- Resume/CV
- Personal Statement
  - *Please upload a personal statement that does not exceed one page, addressing the following points:*
    1. *How the loan repayment program can change your life and your motivation for practicing in an underserved area.*
    2. *A summary of your community service and/or volunteer work.*
    3. *Your professional plans following the two-year BH-SLRP service commitment.*
- Letter of Support from Employer
- A valid license or certification (based on according to applicable professional discipline) to practice as a behavioral health professional in Virginia\*
- Social Security Number
- Driver's License with Current Address (if home address on Driver's License is not current additional documentation will be required)
- Lender Information
- Background Check
- Additional documentation may be requested.
- CAP Fellows may provide a valid license to practice psychiatry in another state and can submit a Virginia limited fellow license, once it is granted.

## **Q. Other Resources**

3RNET (<https://3rnet.org>) is a national database made available at no cost by VDH for employers in rural and underserved areas and health professionals for new employment opportunities in behavioral healthcare.

Eligible BH LRP employers may choose to advertise/post open positions on 3RNET.org. Similarly, behavioral health professionals may use it to search and apply for open positions in rural and underserved areas.

## **R. Questions**

All questions regarding BH LRP should be directed to [incentiveprograms@vdh.virginia.gov](mailto:incentiveprograms@vdh.virginia.gov)

