

February 2026: Latest Updates from Capitol Hill from ARN

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We are pleased to present the February issue of the ARN Health Policy Digest. This member benefit provides updates on health policy and legislative and regulatory developments that may be of interest to rehabilitation nurses.

LHHS FY2026 Appropriations Passes

On February 3, after a brief partial government shutdown, Congress passed 11 out of the 12 appropriations funding bills, including the Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies (LHHS) bill. These bills fund the government for the remainder of fiscal year (FY) 2026 which ends in September.

Notably the LHHS bill rejects the administrations previous proposal to reorganize the agency as well as rejects cuts to the National Institutes of Health that eliminated the National Institute of Nursing Research (NINR). Additionally, the FY26 bill rejected elimination of various Title VIII Nursing Workforce programs at the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) meaning there is funding for the Nursing Workforce Diversity Program and the Nursing Faculty Loan Program.

The Administration for Community Living (ACL) was preserved and under this, the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR) was level funded from FY2025 at a level of \$119,000,000. The HRSA Title VIII Nursing Workforce Programs and NINR were also level funded at the levels of \$305,472,000 and \$197,693,000, respectively. Traumatic Brain Injury Programs under ACL and at the CDC were also level funded with FY25 numbers.

Passing this bills that rejects the elimination of vital nursing programs is promising for future FY2027 funding, and ARN will continue to advocate for robust funding for these programs.

The Department of Education Released Proposed Rule

On January 29, the Department of Education issued a proposed rule that excludes advanced nursing degrees such as MSNs or DNs from the definition of a professional degree.

The rule states that these degrees are not necessary for entrance into the nursing profession, the scope of work varies for nurses by state, and that since nurses must be supervised by another professional, these degrees do not qualify under the definition.

By excluding nurses from the definition of a professional degree, the proposed rule limits the amount of money nurses can borrow.

Graduate students will no longer be able to borrow up to the full cost of attendance and instead students not in professional programs will be limited to \$20,500 annually with a lifetime cap of

\$100,000. This varies from the professional programs which have a limit of \$50,000 annually and \$200,000 for a lifetime.

Limiting the loan assistance for those looking to participate in a graduate program has many potential detrimental affects on both the nursing workforce and patient access to care. Increasing the cost of attending a graduate program can deter people from pursuing a higher degree.

For nursing, if less people pursue advanced nursing degrees there will be a shortage of people who are able to teach at this level, as well as less overall nurses with an advanced degree.

There is already a nursing workforce shortage, and making an advanced degree less attainable will exacerbate the shortage and negatively affect patient care.

ARN is working on submitting comments to advocate for adequate graduate loans for nurses pursuing an advanced degree.

Notice of Funding Opportunities

See current grants and research opportunities for ARN members.

- Nursing Home Staffing Campaign (CMS-2V2-26-001) [<https://simpler.grants.gov/opportunity/2b0aea3d-4706-4508-8a8f-ae605d033e0d>]
- Limited Competition: Community-Partnered Nursing Research Centers for Schools and Colleges for Nursing with Limited NIH Funding (P20 Clinical Trial Optional) (FOR-NR-25-006) [<https://www.grants.gov/search-results-detail/358858>]
- Community Partnered Nursing Research Centers (P20 Clinical Trial Optional) (PAR-25-439) [<https://www.grants.gov/search-results-detail/358816>]
- Leveraging Nursing Research to Advance Healthy School Environments for All (FOR-NR-25-002) [<https://www.grants.gov/search-results-detail/358996>]
- Limited Competition: Ruth L. Kirschstein National Research Service Award (NRSA) Postdoctoral Research Training Grant for the Clinical and Translational Science Awards (CTSA) Program (T32 Clinical Trial Not Allowed) (PAR-25-195) [<https://www.grants.gov/search-results-detail/357838>]
- NINR Mentoring Resources and Activities (FOR-NR-25-003) [<https://www.grants.gov/search-results-detail/359022>]
- Advancing Nutrition-related Research Across the Lifespan (FOR-NR-25-001) [<https://www.grants.gov/search-results-detail/358896>]
- Research Enhancement Award Program (REAP) for Health Professional Schools and Graduate Schools (FOR-PAR-25-420) [<https://www.grants.gov/search-results-detail/359733>]
- Strategies to Improve Health Outcomes and Reduce Health Disparities in Rural Populations (R01 Clinical Trial Optional) (FOR-NR-25-007) [<https://www.grants.gov/search-results-detail/358932>]

The Association of Rehabilitation Nurses

1061 American Lane, Suite 310

Schaumburg, IL 60173-4973

800.229.7530 | 847.375.6481 Fax