

these surveys will be used to plan and redirect resources and efforts as needed to improve service. A generic approval

will be requested from OMB to conduct partner surveys. Focus groups, in-class evaluation forms, mail surveys, and

telephone surveys are expected to be the preferred methodologies. An estimate of annual burden is shown below.

Type of survey	Number of respondents	Responses per respondent	Average burden/response (hours)	Total hours of burden
In-class evaluations	40,000	1	0.05	2,000
Mail/telephone surveys	6,000	1	0.25	1,500
Focus groups	100	1	1.5	150
Total	46,100	1	0.08	3,650

Send comments to Patricia Royston, HRSA Reports Clearance Officer, Room 14-36, Parklawn Building, 5600 Fishers Lane, Rockville, MD 20857. Written comments should be received within 60 days of this notice.

Dated: November 26, 1996.

J. Henry Montes,
Associate Administrator for Policy
Coordination.

[FR Doc. 96-30725 Filed 12-2-96; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4160-15-P

Indian Health Service

Availability of Funds for Loan Repayment Program for Repayment of Health Professions Educational Loans

AGENCY: Indian Health Service, HHS.

ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: The Indian Health Service (IHS) announces that approximately \$11,706,000 in funds for fiscal year (FY) 1997 is available for the repayment of health professions educational loans (undergraduate and graduate) in return for full-time clinical service in Indian health programs. The IHS estimates that 250 loan repayment awards averaging \$50,000 per award may be made with this funding.

Funds are required to be expended by September 30 of the fiscal year. This program is authorized by Section 108 of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act (IHCIA) as amended, 25 U.S.C. 1601 et seq. The IHS invites potential applicants to request an application for participation in the Loan Repayment Program.

DATE: Applications for the FY 1997 Loan Repayment Program will be accepted and evaluated monthly beginning January 2, 1997 and will continue each month thereafter until all funds are exhausted. Subsequent monthly deadline dates are scheduled for Friday of the second full week of each month. Notice of awards will be mailed on the last working day of each month.

Applicants selected for participation in the FY 1997 program cycle will be

expected to begin their service period no later than September 30, 1997.

Applications shall be considered as meeting the deadline if they are either:

1. Received on or before the deadline date; or
2. Sent on or before the deadline date. (Applicants should request a legibly dated U.S. Postal Service postmark or obtain a legibly dated receipt from a commercial carrier or U.S. Postal Service. Private metered postmarks shall not be acceptable as proof of timely mailing.)

Applications received after the monthly closing date will be held for consideration in the next monthly funding cycle. Applicants who do not receive funding by September 30, 1997 will be notified in writing.

FORM TO BE USED FOR APPLICATION:

Applications will be accepted only if they are submitted on the form entitled "Application for the Indian Health Service Loan Repayment Program," identified with the Office of Management and Budget approval number of OMB #0917-0014 (expires 11/30/99).

ADDRESS: Application materials may be obtained by calling or writing to the address below. In addition, completed applications should be returned to: IHS Loan Repayment Program, 12300 Twinbrook Parkway—Suite 100, Rockville, Maryland 20852, PH: 301/443-3396 [between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. (EST) Monday through Friday, except Federal holidays].

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Please address inquiries to Mr. Charles Yepa, Chief, IHS Loan Repayment Program, Twinbrook Metro Plaza—Suite 100, 12300 Twinbrook Parkway, Rockville, Maryland 20852, PH: 301/443-3396 [between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. (EST) Monday through Friday, except Federal holidays].

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Section 108 of the IHCIA as amended by Public Laws 100-713 and 102-573, authorizes the IHS Loan Repayment Program and provides in pertinent part as follows:

The Secretary, acting through the Service, shall establish a program to be known as the Indian Health Service Loan Repayment Program (hereafter referred to as the "Loan Repayment Program") in order to assure an adequate supply of trained health professionals necessary to maintain accreditation of, and provide health care services to Indians through, Indian health programs.

Section 4(n) of the IHCIA, as amended by the Indian Health Care Improvement Technical Corrections Act of 1996, Pub. L. 104-313, provides that:

"Health Profession" means allopathic medicine, family medicine, internal medicine, pediatrics, geriatric medicine, obstetrics and gynecology, podiatric medicine, nursing, public health nursing, dentistry, psychiatry, osteopathy, optometry, pharmacy, psychology, public health, social work, marriage and family therapy, chiropractic medicine, environmental health and engineering, an allied health profession, or any other health profession.

For the purposes of this program, the term "Indian health program" is defined in Section 108(a)(2)(A), as follows:

... any health program or facility funded, in whole or in part, by the IHS for the benefit of American Indians and Alaska Natives and administered:

- a. Directly by the service; or
- b. By any Indian tribe or tribal or Indian organization pursuant to a contract under:
 - (1) The Indian Self-Determination Act; or
 - (2) Section 23 of the Act of April 30, 1908, (25 U.S.C. 47), popularly known as the Buy Indian Act; or
 - (3) By an urban Indian organization pursuant to Title V of this act.

Applicants may sign contractual agreements with the Secretary for 2 years. The IHS will repay all or a portion of the applicant's health professions educational loans (undergraduate and graduate) for tuition expenses and reasonable educational and living expenses in amounts up to \$30,000 per year for each year of contracted service to be made in annual payments to the participant for the purpose of repaying his/her outstanding health professions educational loans. Repayment of health professions educational loans will be made to the

participant within 120 days after the participant's entry on duty has been confirmed by the IHS.

The Secretary must approve the contract before the disbursement of loan repayments can be made to the participant. Participants will be required to fulfill their contract service agreements through full-time clinical practice at an Indian health program site determined by the Secretary. Loan repayment sites are characterized by physical, cultural, and professional isolation, and have histories of frequent staff turnover. All Indian health program sites are annually prioritized by discipline, based on need or vacancy by the Agency.

All health professionals will receive up to \$30,000 per year, regardless of their length of contract. Where payments under the Loan Repayment Program result in an increase in Federal income tax liability, the IHS will pay up to 31 percent of the participant's total loan repayments to the Internal Revenue Service on the participant's behalf for all or part of the increased tax liability of the participant.

Pursuant to Section 108(b), to be eligible to participate in the Loan Repayment Program an individual must:

- (1) A. be enrolled:
 - (i) in a course of study or program in an accredited institution, as determined by the Secretary, within any State and be scheduled to complete such course of study in the same year such individual applies to participate in the Loan Repayment Program. (This includes the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau); or
 - (ii) in an approved graduate training program in a health profession; or
- B. have a degree in a health profession and a license to practice; and
- (2) A. be eligible for, or hold an appointment as a Commissioned Officer in the Regular or Reserve Corps of the Public Health Service; or
- B. be eligible for selection for civilian service in the Regular or Reserve Corps of the Public Health Service; or
- C. meet the professional standards for civil service employment in the IHS; or
- D. be employed in an Indian health program without service obligation; and
- (3) submit to the Secretary an application and contract to the Loan Repayment Program; and
- (4) sign and submit to the Secretary, a written contract agreeing to accept repayment of educational loans and to serve for the applicable period of

obligated service in a priority site as determined by the Secretary; and

(5) sign an affidavit attesting to the fact that they have been informed of the relative merits of the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps and the Civil Service as employment options.

Upon approval of the applicant for participation in the Loan Repayment Program, the applicant will receive confirmation of his/her loan repayment award and the duty site at which he/she will serve his/her loan repayment obligation.

The IHS has identified the positions in each Indian health program for which there is a need or vacancy and ranked those positions in order of priority by developing discipline specific prioritized lists of sites. Ranking criteria for these sites include the following:

- Historically critical shortages caused by frequent staff turnover;
- Current unmatched vacancies in a Health Profession Discipline;
- Projected vacancies in a Health Profession Discipline;
- Ensuring that the staffing needs of Indian health programs administered by an Indian tribe or tribal or health organization receive consideration on an equal basis with programs that are administered directly by the Service; and
- Giving priority to vacancies in Indian health programs that have a need for health professionals to provide health care services as a result of individuals having breached Loan Repayment Program contracts entered into under this section. Consistent with this priority ranking, in determining which applications to approve and which contracts to accept, the IHS will give priority to applications made by American Indians and Alaska Natives and to individuals recruited through the efforts of Indian tribes or tribal or Indian organizations.
- With respect to priorities among the various health professions, the statute requires that of the total amount appropriated for FY 1997 for loan repayment contracts, not less than 25 percent be provided to applicants who are nurses, nurse practitioners, or nurse midwives and not less than 10 percent be provided to applicants who are mental health professionals (other than nurses, nurse practitioners, or nurse midwives). This requirement does not apply if the number of applications from these two groups, respectively, is not sufficient to meet the requirement.
- Subject to the above statutory priority for nurses and mental health practitioners, the IHS will give priority in funding among health professionals to physicians in the following priority

specialties: anesthesiology, emergency room medicine, general surgery, obstetrics/gynecology, ophthalmology, orthopedic surgery, otolaryngology/otorhinolaryngol, psychiatry and radiology.

The following factors are equal in weight when applied, and are applied when all other criteria are equal and a selection must be made between applicants.

One or all of the following factors may be applicable to an applicant, and the applicant who has the most of these factors, all other criteria equal, would be selected.

- An applicant's length of current employment in the IHS, tribal or urban program.
- Availability for service earlier than other applicants (first come, first served); and
- Date the individual's application was received.

Any individual who enters this program and satisfactorily completed his or her obligated period of service may apply to extend the contract on a year-by-year basis, as determined by the IHS, at the maximum amount of up to \$30,000 per year and additional 31 percent for Federal Withholding. If funds are available, the maximum amount will be funded in this manner and will not exceed the total of the individual's outstanding eligible health professions educational loans.

Any individual who owes an obligation for health professional service to the Federal Government or to a State or other entity under an agreement with such State or other entity is not eligible for the Loan Repayment Program unless such an obligation will be completely satisfied prior to the beginning of service under this program in the year that an application is made for this program.

This program is not subject to review under Executive Order 12372.

(The Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance number is 93.164.)

Dated: November 26, 1996

Michael H. Trujillo,

Assistant Surgeon General Director.

[FR Doc. 96-30726 Filed 12-2-96; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4160-16-M