



Federal Loan Policy Changes Affecting Graduate Nursing Education

Many of you have expressed worry, concern and confusion about the recent news regarding federal student loans and how it might impact you. The Mississippi Nurses' Association (MNA) remains committed to providing you with information to help you make informed decisions about your future.

On May 1, 2026, the U.S. Department of Education released the final rule for “Reimagining and Improving Student Education (RISE),” which changes how graduate nursing education is financed. This means the greatest impact will likely be felt by registered nurses seeking advanced degrees. For many Mississippi nurses, graduate education is not only a career goal, but also a pathway to expanding healthcare access in their communities.

These changes may significantly affect nursing because nursing programs are currently categorized under federal graduate loan limits rather than higher borrowing limits available to certain federally designated professional degree programs, like medicine, dentistry, and law.

Beginning on July 1, 2026, the federal government will move away from cost-of-attendance lending and toward flat limits for graduate borrowing through the following measures:

- Elimination of Grad PLUS Loans: This program will end for new borrowers. Previously, Grad PLUS helped nurses finance MSN, DNP, CRNA, and other advanced degrees.
- New (Lower) Borrowing Caps: Federal graduate loans will be limited to \$20,500 per year and a \$100,000 lifetime maximum.

When considering the cost of tuition, it is realistic for some advanced nursing programs, especially nurse anesthesia programs, to approach or exceed \$100,000 in total educational cost when tuition, fees, clinical expenses, and living costs are combined. This reality creates a funding gap.

For example, a nurse who first completes a master's degree and later returns for a DNP, PhD, or post-graduate certification may have less federal aid remaining to continue advancing their education. In some cases, nurses may need to rely on private loans, personal savings, or delayed enrollment to continue their education.

This could especially affect:

- Nurse Practitioner students
- Nurse Anesthetist students
- Nurse Educators
- Nurses pursuing Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) or PhD degrees
- Nurses returning to school later in their careers



For many nurses, particularly working adults, parents, and those serving rural communities, federal student loans are often what make advanced education possible.

If you are currently enrolled in a graduate program and have a federal loan disbursed before July 1, 2026, you may be protected by a “grandfathering” clause. This allows you to continue using the old borrowing limits and Grad PLUS program for up to three years to finish your current degree.

MNA recognizes that additional federal guidance and implementation details may continue to emerge in the coming months. We will monitor these changes and engage with educational leaders, policymakers, and healthcare partners to better understand the long-term impact on Mississippi nurses and communities.

MNA remains committed to advancing the practice of every registered nurse and advanced practice registered nurse in Mississippi through advocacy, education, research, partnership, and community.