



**CSWE Public Policy Update: House and Senate Pass Veterans Health Bill;
Reinstates Scholarships for Social Workers
Updated: May 18, 2010**

On May 5, 2010, President Obama signed into law the *Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010* (S. 1963), a bill that authorizes new and expands existing programs within the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) aimed at addressing issues such as caregiver support, women veterans, rural health improvements, mental health care, and homelessness, among other issues.

Over the last year, CSWE has been working with Congressman Ciro Rodriguez (D-TX)—a social worker, social work educator, and CSWE champion—on reestablishing a scholarship program within the VA that expired in the 1990s. This program—the *Health Professionals Educational Assistance Scholarship Program*—provides scholarships to bachelors or master’s students in select health professions in return for a service obligation in the VA. In the past, the scholarship funds were awarded primarily to nurses. CSWE worked with Congressman Rodriguez’s office to broaden the eligibility of the program to include social workers in an effort to increase assistance for social workers working within the VA system and to further raise the visibility of social work as a critical component of the VA’s clinical health care team. Working closely with Congressman Rodriguez, reestablishment and enhancement of the scholarship program was successfully included in S. 1963. This is a significant achievement for CSWE’s Public Policy Initiative and CSWE members.

The *Health Professionals Educational Assistance Scholarship Program* will be open to individuals who are enrolled or are accepted for enrollment as full-time students in a qualifying field of education or training, which now includes social work. Current VA employees are also eligible to apply for reduced support. The VA agrees to pay the tuition of the participant for that school year (the actual level of support would be negotiated between the VA and the institution providing the training), payment of other reasonable expenses (such as fees, books, and laboratory expenses), and a stipend. In return, the participant agrees to serve as a full-time employee providing clinical practice in the Veterans Health Administration for not less than 2 years.

It is important to note that information on how to apply for the scholarships is not yet available. Now that the program has been re-established through legislation (and social workers are included) the VA will have to develop a plan for how to administer it. It has been 15 years since the last awards were made; therefore, it could take some time before VA releases details on the competition for scholarship awards. CSWE will continue to monitor the status of the program and report when proposals are being sought for scholarships.

In addition to the scholarship program, CSWE and Congressman Rodriguez also successfully advocated for enhancement of a Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) loan repayment program for clinical researchers from disadvantaged backgrounds. This existing program—the *Ruth L. Kirschstein*

National Research Service Awards [Extramural Clinical Research Loan Repayment Program for Individuals from Disadvantaged Backgrounds](#) (LRP-IDB)—which is administered by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), seeks to improve recruitment and retention of highly qualified health professionals from disadvantaged backgrounds to clinical research careers by providing loan repayment up to \$35,000 per year of service. S. 1963 enhances the program so that now clinical research within a VA facility will count toward the required service obligation for loan repayment.

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