



**Protect Graduate Nursing Education:  
Demand That Nursing Be Recognized as a Professional Degree**

The U.S. Department of Education’s proposed redefinition of a “professional degree” excludes nursing. This change would cap federal student loans for graduate nursing education at approximately half the level available to other professional programs—such as medicine, dentistry, and law—and would eliminate access to Grad PLUS loans for nursing students.

This decision threatens the future of advanced nursing education and undermines access to care nationwide.

**Why This Matters**

Graduate nursing programs prepare Nurse Practitioners (NPs), Clinical Nurse Specialists (CNSs), Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNAs), Certified Nurse Midwives (CNMs), and other advanced practice nurses who are essential to the U.S. healthcare system. Limiting federal loan access will:

- Reduce access to graduate nursing education
- Exacerbate workforce shortages
- Disproportionately impact rural and underserved communities
- Undermine healthcare access in states like North Dakota, where APRNs are vital to primary and specialty care delivery

Nursing is a rigorous, practice-focused profession that requires advanced education, clinical training, and licensure. It must be recognized as a **professional degree**.

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## Take Action Now

### Join the NDNPA

NDNPA advocates for policies that support full practice authority, equitable access to care, and a strong NP workforce—especially in North Dakota’s rural and underserved communities. Membership provides opportunities for professional growth, leadership development, continuing education, and connection with colleagues who share a commitment to high-quality, patient-centered care. By joining NDNPA, you help ensure that nurse practitioners are recognized, supported, and empowered to practice to the full extent of their education and training.

To join, click the [Link to NDNPA](#)

### Sign the National Petition

The American Nurses Association (ANA), joined by more than 50 nursing and healthcare organizations, is calling on the Department of Education to revise the definition of “professional degree” to explicitly include nursing.

#### How to participate:

- Visit **RNAction.org** or click the [Link to ANA Petition](#)
- Locate the campaign on *Professional Student Loan Caps / Professional Degree Definition*
- Enter your contact information (used only to match you with policymakers)
- Review the pre-written message and personalize it with 1–2 sentences describing your role (e.g., NP, student, faculty, patient)
- Submit the petition

Your voice matters.

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## Use APRN Advocacy Tools

Visit the **American Association of Nurse Practitioners** [Issue Hub](#) and [Advocacy Center](#)

Through these platforms, you can:

- Learn how the proposed definition affects NPs
  - Send targeted messages to Congress and the Department of Education
  - Download issue briefs and one-page summaries outlining the impact on NPs
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To address lifetime loan limits on professional students, go to the AANP [Advocacy Center](#)

- Add your zip code followed by home address to view your North Dakota Federal Officials
- Locate the “Compose Your Message” link for each member of the North Dakota delegation.
- Use these links to send your message directly to each member.
- Send a pre-drafted email urging them to support congressional letters calling on the Department of Education to recognize post-baccalaureate nursing education as a professional degree

### **Submit Public Comments to the Federal Register**

The Department of Education is expected to open a public comment period—anticipated in **early 2026**—through the Federal Register. This 30-day window allows individuals and organizations to directly voice concerns about the proposed rule.

The North Dakota Nurse Practitioner Association will notify members when the comment period opens and provide guidance on submitting effective comments.

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### **The Time to Act Is Now**

Advanced practice nurses are essential to the health of North Dakota and the nation. Failing to recognize nursing as a professional degree threatens our workforce, our patients, and the future of healthcare access.

Stand with NDNPA. Advocate for nursing. Protect graduate nursing education.