

EMPLOYEE INCENTIVE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

1. REASON FOR ISSUE: This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Directive is issued to update the Employee Incentive Scholarship Program (EISP) policy and regulations with applicable provisions of Public Law 107 – 135, the Department of Veterans Affairs Health Care Programs Enhancement Act of 2001.

2. SUMMARY OF CHANGES: The Handbooks related to this directive have been revised consistent with amendments to the provisions of law that cover EISP. These changes include:

a. Deleting references to an expiration date for the EISP since there is now permanent authority to administer the program.

b. Changing the minimum period of Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) employment for eligibility from 2 years to 1 year.

c. Defining full-time undergraduate coursework as 30 semester hours per undergraduate school year and full-time graduate coursework as 18 semester hours per year.

d. Adding the provision to increase the maximum scholarship award in direct proportion to the periodic general Federal pay increases for those awards that are obligated in the same fiscal year that such increases take effect.

3. RELATED DOCUMENTS: VHA Handbook 1020.1, and VHA Handbook 1020.2.

4. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE: The Health Care Staff Development and Retention Office (10A2D) is responsible for the contents of this Directive. Questions may be referred to (504) 589-5267 or (202) 273-8887.

5. RESCISSIONS: VHA Directive 1020 dated December 27, 1999, is rescinded.

6. RECERTIFICATION: The document is scheduled for recertification on/or before the last working day of May 2007.

S/ Dennis H. Smith for
Robert H. Roswell, M.D.
Under Secretary for Health

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1. PURPOSE: This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Directive implements the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Employee Incentive Scholarship Program (EISP) to assist VHA in meeting its current or anticipated staffing needs in certain health care occupations for which recruitment or retention is difficult.

2. AUTHORITY: The Secretary of Veterans Affairs has delegated authority to the Under Secretary for Health to issue regulations implementing the Health Professionals Education Assistance Program (HPEAP), Title 38, U.S.C., Chapter 76, in accordance with Title 38, United States Code (U.S.C.), Sections 501, 512 and 7421. This Directive constitutes VA's regulations implementing the EISP component of HPEAP.

3. POLICY: It is VHA policy to establish EISP which is authorized by Title VIII of Public Law 105-368 and amended by Public Law 107-135. VA will award EISP scholarships, consistent with statutory authority, to qualifying and approved employees to assist VHA in meeting its health care staffing needs in positions described in Section 7401 of Title 38, United States Code (U.S.C.), for which recruitment or retention of qualified personnel is difficult. This includes helping current VHA employees satisfy post-appointment changes to VHA's national qualification standards; or similar policies related to education or training that affect VHA's mission and, in turn, its health care staffing requirements. As a condition of accepting a scholarship, the employee-recipient of an award must sign a standard EISP contract. Included among the provisions of the contract is the requirement that the recipient serve a period of obligated service as a full-time VHA employee. This period begins on the date that the participant is appointed as a full-time employee in VHA, if the appointment date occurs after the course completion date of the participant. If the participant is a full-time VHA employee on the course completion date, the period begins on the date thereafter that the employee is assigned to a position for which the agency-sponsored training prepared the participant. If, on the course completion date, the participant is a full-time employee serving in a capacity for which the agency-sponsored training prepared the employee, the period of obligated service begins on the participant's course completion date. Details regarding such service commitment are contained in VHA Handbook 1020.1, which includes a copy of the EISP Contract. EISP awards may cover the cost of the recipient's tuition, in whole or in part, and related educational expenses. Scholarship recipients who breach the terms of their written agreements will incur statutory liability (as appropriate, depending on the facts of each case). Waiver of a recipient's payment or service obligation may be requested and granted in accordance with the statutory waiver provisions that apply to VA's Health Professionals Educational Assistance Program (38 U.S.C. Chapter 76) as a whole.

4. ACTION

a. The Director, Health Care Staff Development and Retention Office (HCSDDRO) (10A2D), is responsible for national implementation and management of the EISP. This includes, but is not limited to, policy development and implementation, funding allocation, and program oversight and evaluation.

b. Facility Directors are responsible for local-level EISP implementation and management consistent with this Directive and its related Handbook. Other specific responsibilities of the facility Director include:

(1) Ensuring that local policies and procedures related to this Directive are developed and implemented with pre-decisional involvement of Labor-Management Partnerships.

(2) Identifying health care staffing needs that can be met through use of EISP.

(3) Recommending that scholarships be awarded, as appropriate, to eligible employees who are approved under this program, consistent with statutory authority and the EISP Handbook.

(4) Invoking their authority under 38 U.S.C. 7405 to authorize replacement salary in limited cases where an employee is unavailable to perform critical duties while pursuing education or training under EISP. In such cases, replacement salary may be used to help prevent disruption of critical health care services. *NOTE: Funding for replacement salary is not included in the expenses that are allowed for a scholarship under EISP.*

(5) Submitting initial enrollment and semi-annual reports to the Director, HCSDRO, consistent with requirements and procedures set forth in the EISP Handbook.

c. VISN Directors need to submit funding requests when they plan to coordinate, as well as support, the infrastructure for innovative, accessible and cost-effective education or training programs that are consistent with their strategic staffing goals and impact several facilities.

5. REFERENCES

a. Title 38 U.S.C. Section 512, Sections 7401-7402, Section 7421, Sections 7601-7604, Sections 7632-7636 and Sections 7671-7675.

c. Public Law 105-368.

d. Public Law 107-135.

e. MP-4, Part 1, Chapter 8, subparagraphs 8A.16 and 8A.18.