



For Immediate Release

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National Academies of Practice Urges U.S. Department of Education to Reinstate Key Health Fields as “Professional” Programs

Lexington, KY — The National Academies of Practice (NAP) is a non-profit organization representing distinguished practitioners and scholars across 17 U.S. health professions including athletic training, audiology, nursing, nutrition and dietetics, occupational therapy, optometry, oral health, pharmacy, physical therapy, physicians, podiatric medicine, psychology, public health, respiratory care, social work, speech-language pathology, and veterinary medicine.

NAP is calling on the U.S. Department of Education to reverse its recent decision to narrowly define professional programs eligible for higher federal borrowing caps by removing the phrase “but not limited to” from its definition of “professional” programs. Excluding long-recognized health professions from this classification will further strain an already under resourced healthcare system, exacerbate workforce shortages, and reduce patient access to essential services -- particularly in rural and underserved communities.

The proposed reclassification, paired with The One Big Beautiful Bill’s new borrowing caps on federal student loans, threatens student recruitment and retention, alignment with accreditation standards, federal reporting systems, and the stability of the nation’s healthcare workforce pipeline. These disciplines—central to prevention, primary care, rehabilitation, behavioral health, communication sciences, social care, and health professions education—have long required advanced education, rigorous training, and state licensure and are widely recognized as professional programs.

NAP President Dr. Anthony Breitbach states that “this change is not a technical adjustment—it is a serious setback for the U.S. healthcare workforce. These professions are essential to the delivery of safe, effective, and equitable care. Removing their classification as professional programs undermines the systems that prepare, support, and sustain the health professionals our communities rely on.”

NAP cautions that eliminating these fields from the “professional” classification will limit students’ access to critical financial aid, loan repayment, and workforce development programs. Reduced financial support will deter prospective students, worsen existing workforce shortages, and undermine access to care nationwide. The proposed change also jeopardizes the accuracy of national workforce data and disrupts alignment among accreditation, licensure, and federal

reporting systems. Financial access to healthcare education is a public health issue, not merely a fiscal policy matter.

NAP is particularly concerned about the detrimental impact this decision will have on **interprofessional education (IPE)** and **interprofessional collaborative practice (IPCP)**—team-based approaches that improve patient outcomes, reduce costs, and strengthen care coordination, especially for an aging population. Professions affected by this change play vital roles in primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention including chronic disease management, rehabilitation, behavioral health, oral health, communication support, social care, and preventive services. The removal of these professions from the Professional Degree Designation is also fundamentally misaligned with the federal health priorities and investments, including behavioral health and mental health, disability and rehabilitation services, maternal and child health, aging and dementia care, rural and medically underserved community health, the Social Determinants of Health, and the expansion of interprofessional, team-based care delivery.

NAP urges the Department of Education to urgently restore these fields to the professional program classification and calls on policymakers, educators, health system leaders, and healthcare providers to support this critical correction.

About the National Academies of Practice

Founded in 1981, the National Academies of Practice is a non-profit, interprofessional organization that advises governmental bodies on the nation's health care system. NAP brings together expert practitioners and scholars from 17 health professions to support collaboration, excellence in practice, and policies that promote high-quality, person-centered care.

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