



National
Multiple Sclerosis
Society

Please Support LB 20-Rural Health Professional Incentive Programs

What is multiple sclerosis (MS)?

- MS is an unpredictable, often disabling disease of the central nervous system.
- MS interrupts the flow of information within the brain, and between the brain and body.
- Symptoms range from numbness and tingling to blindness and paralysis.
- The progress, severity and specific symptoms of MS in any one person cannot yet be predicted.
- Approximately 3,500 Nebraskans are living with MS.

Those living with MS in rural communities:

- Have less access to physicians and health care resources
- Report lower health-related quality of life
- Are less likely to be on MS specialty medications (disease-modifying treatment)
- Have more transportation and distance barriers

Understanding the needs of people with MS in rural communities:

- Those living in rural areas receive a MS diagnosis on average a year and a half later, delaying critically important MS treatments.
- Rural residents more likely to have primary progressive MS, the most disabling course of the disease.
- Approximately half of people with MS in rural communities are not taking FDA approved MS treatments.

Barriers to care:

- People living with MS in rural areas report that medical services are located too far from their homes to access and travel an average of 103 miles for MS-focused care.

Background on LB 20 (Nordquist) Rural Health Professional Incentive Programs

LB 20 would increase the appropriation to the Rural Health Incentive Program to provide more financial incentives for newly-graduated health professionals to practice in medically underserved areas.

Nebraska is currently experiencing a shortage of medical professionals and most counties are designated as medically underserved in a variety of health professions:

- Currently, there are 1,210 primary care physicians in Nebraska, which is **275 less than needed** to meet the increased demand resulting from health care reform by 2014.
- Of the 93 Nebraska counties, **11 counties - all rural - do not have a primary care physician.**
- The number of primary care physicians older than 65 years of age has grown by 78% in the past 5 years.

The average medical student in 2012 graduated with \$166,750 in student loan debt.

- The Rural Health Incentive Programs provides new graduates with incentives to practice in these medically underserved areas.

What are the Rural Health Incentive Programs?

The Rural Health Systems and Professional Incentive Act, passed in 1991, created the Nebraska Student Loan Program and the Nebraska Loan Repayment Program (collectively called the "Rural Incentive Programs").

- **Nebraska Student Loan Program** provides forgivable student loans to students who agree to practice in an approved shortage area.
- **Nebraska Loan Repayment Program** assists rural communities in recruiting and retaining primary care health professionals by offering state matching funds for repayment of health professionals' educational debt.

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