

APA to Advocate for Loan Repayment Aid to Psychiatrists in Public Settings

[Mark Moran](#)

APA's Board of Trustees has approved a policy to advocate for state and federal legislation to provide funds to help repay loans for psychiatrists in community mental health centers, state psychiatric hospitals, and correctional facilities and for those using telemedicine to treat patients in these facilities.



Altha Stewart, M.D., reports on her meeting with leaders of the Japanese Society of Psychiatry and Neurology.

The decision stemmed from an Assembly action paper approved by the APA Board of Trustees at its meeting last month in Washington, D.C. It was among a number of issues addressed by the Board, including ligature risk in hospitals, weapons use in inpatient facilities, solitary confinement of juveniles, and physician burnout.

The action paper addressing loan repayment for psychiatrists working in certain public settings was sponsored by Mary Jo Fitz-Gerald, M.D., and Mark Townsend, M.D., both representatives from the Louisiana Psychiatric Association. It was cosponsored by 17 other Assembly representatives.

The action paper noted that a 2012 report by the Association of American Medical Colleges indicated that some 86 percent of graduates have medical school debt, and the average debt for medical students across the country in 2011 was more than \$160,000.

Meanwhile, the projected need for psychiatrists is greatly outpacing the current supply. The Department of Health and Human Services reports about 4,000 areas where there is only one psychiatrist for 30,000 or more individuals. More than 45 percent of psychiatrists are over age 60.

The action paper also emphasized that there is precedent for federal subsidies of medical school loans. The Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans Act (Clay Hunt SAV Act), signed into law by President Barack

Obama in 2015, established a pilot project encouraging more psychiatrists to choose a career with the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) by offering medical school loan repayments on par with other government agencies and private practices.