

The Nurse Practitioner Can See You Now: Policies, Barriers, and Advocacy Opportunities in 2026 and Beyond

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Background

- APPs comprise 54% of clinicians (FTE) in community health centers¹
- NPs comprise 50% of the U.S. primary care workforce²
- NPs offer cost-effective, high-quality care to patients with diverse medical needs
- The proportion of NPs in primary care is decreasing, going from 34% in 2021 to **30%** in 2022³
- **Policy and cultural barriers limit full APP potential amid primary care workforce shortages**

Policy Barriers

Limited funding for postgraduate training (residencies and fellowships)^{4,5}

\$20B	\$30M (0.1% of GME)
Physician + Dentist GME (Medicare)	Advanced Nursing Education NP Residency and Fellowship (HRSA)

Fragmented state practice policies⁶

11 Number of states with restricted NP practice

Reimbursement inequities⁷

- 85%**
- Current Medicare reimbursement rate for APP care as percentage of physician fee schedule for same service (or “incident-to” billing)
 - Commercial health plans often default to Medicare rate



New policy threat - graduate student loan limits

\$50K/yr

“Professionals”
(MD, DO, JD, etc.)

\$20.5K/yr*

“Non-Professionals” (NP, PA, etc.)
*pending litigation and bills

Issue Updates



House/Senate bills in committee to amend Higher Education Act of 1965 - includes nursing (MSN, DNP, DNAP, or Ph.D.) in “professional” category⁸



Federal court temporarily blocked loan limits for PAs and NPs – pending trial⁹



FY 2027 President’s budget request eliminated most Title VIII workforce programs (↓\$213M) - House budget restores funding and awaits approval



States like SC and NY have bills in committee to expand NP and PA practice authority, respectively, and access to care¹⁰



Over 500 APP residency and fellowship programs are sponsored by community health centers, the VA, and major health systems – and growing

Cultural Considerations

Who leads primary care teams?



The expert primary care clinician (NP, PA, MD, DO) who aspires to and enjoys leading the team, based on licensing requirements, practice characteristics

References

1. HRSA. 2025. Uniform Data System, 2024. <https://data.hrsa.gov>
2. HRSA. 2025. State of the Primary Care Workforce. <https://bhw.hrsa.gov/>
3. Jabbarpour Y et al. 2025. The Health of US Primary Care: 2025 Scorecard Report. Milbank Memorial Fund.
4. Government Accountability Office. 2025. Graduate Medical Education: New Medicare-Funded Physician Residency Positions. <https://www.gao.gov/>
5. HRSA. 2023. Advanced Nursing Education Nurse Practitioner Residency and Fellowship Program. <https://www.grants.gov/>
6. American Association of Nurse Practitioners. 2026. State Practice Environment. <https://www.aanp.org/>
7. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. 1990. 42 CFR 414.
8. U.S. House of Representatives. 2026. H.R. 8659/8691; U.S. Senate. 2026. S.4568. <https://www.congress.gov/>
9. AANP v. McMahon, No. 1:26-cv-01780-BAH, Mem. Op. (D.D.C. June 24, 2026), ECF No. 46.
10. SC General Assembly. 2026. S.1176; NY State Senate. 2026. A7988

Opportunities

Look to team-based care delivery or training models

Example: Vermont’s Blueprint for Health; Veterans Affairs (VA) and HRSA Health Center Program models

Champion payment parity for Medicare, Medicaid, and commercial health plans where NPs are reimbursed 100% of physician rates

Example: Oregon passed the first pay parity act in 2013

Leverage Medicare and Medicaid GME dollars to fund APP postgraduate training

Example: Medicaid-funded Family NP residencies in Massachusetts health centers (Under 1115 Waiver)

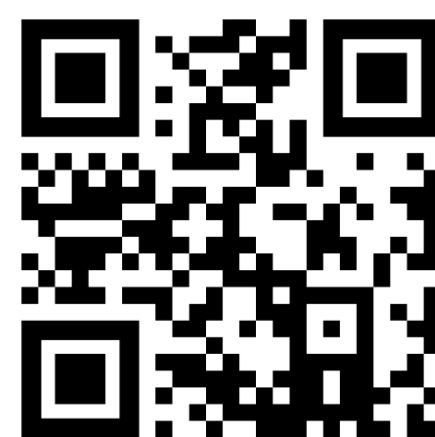
Explore value-based models and other payment innovations

Example: Maryland’s Medicaid Advanced Primary Care Program

Advocate

- Research and evaluation: Evidence for advocacy
- Get to know (and contact) your national, state, local representatives
- Comment on proposed rules (Regulations.gov or your state and local sites)
- Connect with your professional representation
- Write! Op-eds, perspective pieces in journals

Who represents you?



For further reading

Investing in Primary Care: The Nurse Practitioner Will See You Now. McCann J & Flinter M. 2025. The Milbank Memorial Fund: Washington, DC.

