

Fund the Pediatric Subspecialty Loan Repayment Program (PSLRP)

More than one million children in the U.S. are affected by rheumatologic diseases, including nearly 300,000 American children with juvenile arthritis, but there are **fewer than 400 board-certified pediatric rheumatologists in the U.S. to treat them.**

Five states have only one practicing pediatric rheumatologist and nine states have none meaning that nearly 75 percent of juvenile arthritis patients are being treated either by a pediatrician—not trained in the most effective treatments for rheumatologic diseases—or by adult rheumatologists, who may be less familiar with the diagnosis and management of pediatric-specific rheumatologic conditions or have not had adequate training on issues such as growth and development.

- a. **The PSLRP is a loan repayment program** to serve pediatric providers in primary care, subspecialties, and dentistry who serve rural and underserved areas.
- b. **A reauthorization of this program** was included in the CARES Act, but without the suggested \$50 million, or any funding, for it to operate.

Workforce shortages prevent children from getting the care they need.

- a. **Appointment wait-times** for certain pediatric subspecialty care far exceed the prevailing benchmark of two weeks according to recent survey data—
 - i. The wait time for a juvenile arthritis patient can be multiple weeks or months, depending on their area or state. Other juvenile patients also struggle to have timely care. For example:
 1. Patients wait 18.7 weeks for an appointment with a developmental pediatrician; and
 2. For 8.3 weeks for a pediatric dermatologist.
- b. **Families in many parts of the country travel hundreds of miles to get appropriate care for their children.** Some families require a flight just to see the right doctor.
- c. **Many primary care pediatricians report difficulties** referring their patients to subspecialists.

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Financial burdens make it difficult for pediatric trainees to pursue additional training to become subspecialists.

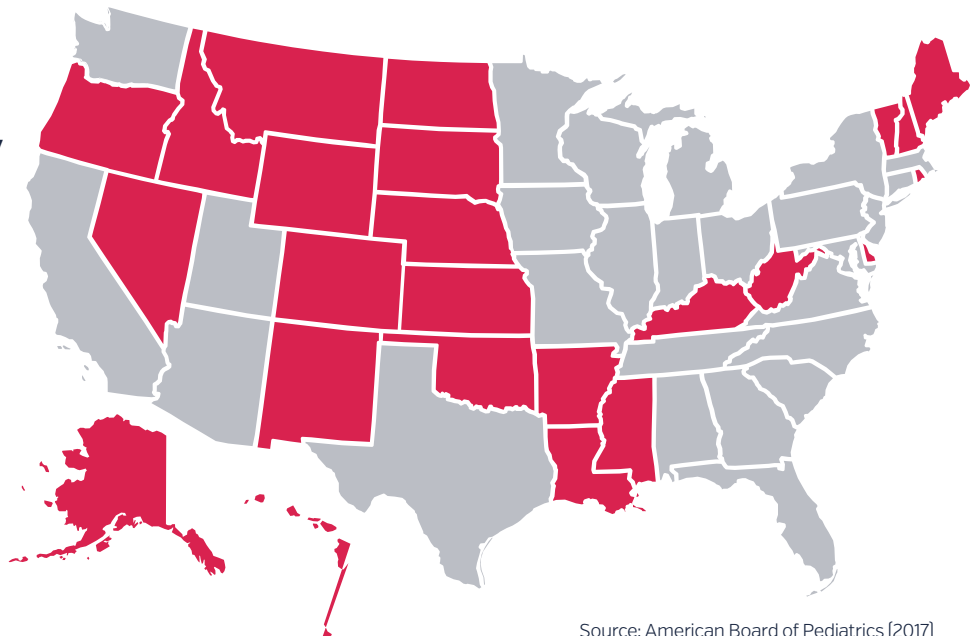
- a. Subspecialists like pediatric rheumatologists spend an additional 2 to 3 years** beyond their primary residency as a trainee, further delaying their physician salary and exacerbating the significant burden of student loan debt.
- b. Pediatric subspecialists often earn less than general pediatricians**, or if they earn more it is not enough to compensate for the earnings lost during additional training.
- c. Pediatric training positions across the US often go unfilled** as fewer residents choose subspecialties like rheumatology due to financial constraints.
- d. The PSLRP will provide qualifying child health professionals with up to \$35,000 in loan repayment** per year for practicing in an underserved area for at least two years.

Nationwide pediatric rheumatology practices are in limited supply, with many current pediatric rheumatologists on the verge of retirement, and the demand for specialized care continues to grow. This shortage remains both an issue of overall numbers and a geographical issue across states. Over 32% of pediatric rheumatology training programs were left unfilled for 2021 and a significant percentage of U.S. hospitals reported vacancies of 12 months or longer for positions in other pediatric subspecialties, including neurology, child and adolescent psychiatry, and dermatology.

ASK: Fund the PSLRP with \$50 million for FY 2022.

Pediatric Rheumatology Workforce Shortage

 = States with three or fewer pediatric rheumatologists



Source: American Board of Pediatrics (2017)