



PRESS STATEMENT

Department of Education's Proposed "Professional Degree" Restrictions Threaten Healthcare Workforce and Patient Care

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Brentwood, TN – On October 27, 2025, the Department of Education proposed changes to how graduate degrees are classified. The Case Management Society of America (CMSA) opposes the changes that would drastically narrow which educational degrees qualify as "professional," thereby limiting federal loan eligibility for students pursuing master's and doctoral education in nursing, social work, counseling, occupational therapy, physical therapy, respiratory therapy, and speech-language pathology; all disciplines that are foundational to professional case management practice.

The proposed changes would create a two-tiered financial system with significant consequences. Ten fields designated as "professional" under the 1965 federal statute would continue to qualify for up to \$50,000 per year in federal loans (with a \$200,000 lifetime cap), while all other graduate programs would be restricted to just \$20,500 annually and a \$100,000 total limit. The proposal also eliminates the Grad PLUS loan program and restricts Parent PLUS loans to \$20,000 annually.

This policy directly threatens case management's professional workforce. According to CMSA's 2022 Standards of Practice, professional case managers must possess advanced education and maintain competence through licensure or certification in health or human services disciplines. Yet nearly all disciplines cited in these standards would be excluded from "professional" designation.

"The proposed ruling is based on an outdated 1965 definition that fails to reflect modern healthcare delivery," said Colleen Morley, DNP, RN, CCM, CMAC, CMGT-BC, CMCN, ACM-RN, FCM, FAACM, CMSA National Immediate Past President. "In 1965, case management as a profession didn't exist, advanced practice nursing was in its infancy, and interprofessional collaborative care was not standard practice. Today's complex healthcare landscape demands a sophisticated, diverse workforce."

Additionally, the implications extend beyond education financing. The healthcare industry already faces critical workforce shortages that this policy will dramatically worsen. By creating prohibitive financial barriers to graduate education, the Department of Education threatens to deepen shortages at precisely the moment when an aging population and increasing chronic disease prevalence demand expanded healthcare capacity.



“For professional case managers, the strength of our healthcare system depends on a steady pipeline of well-prepared professionals,” said CMSA National President-Elect Jenny Quigley-Stickney, RN, MSN, MHA, MA, CCM, ACM-RN, CMAC, CPHM, FCM. “By restricting these degree pathways, the Department of Education risks weakening the coordinated, patient-centered system we work every day to uphold. These limits create barriers for clinicians pursuing advanced degrees and slow the development of the case managers we need to sustain and grow our future workforce.”

CMSA joins nursing, social work, occupational therapy, physical therapy, public health, and allied health organizations in united opposition to this proposal. The American Nurses Association, National Association of Social Workers, American Occupational Therapy Association, American Public Health Association, and numerous other organizations have mobilized advocacy efforts and launched petitions calling for action.

The Department of Education is expected to issue a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) in January 2026, initiating a formal public comment period. CMSA urges all invested parties to submit comments advocating for the inclusion of nursing, social work, counseling, occupational therapy, physical therapy, respiratory therapy, speech-language pathology, and public health as professional degrees.

“At its core, case management is about ensuring patients receive safe, seamless, and equitable care. Policies shaping educational pathways must reflect the realities of modern healthcare and not restrict access to advanced education. We call on the Department of Education to adopt a definition that recognizes the full spectrum of disciplines essential to coordinated care and the health of our communities. Our ability to meet rising patient needs depends on removing, not creating barriers to preparing future case managers. The stability of our workforce and the well-being of those we serve depends on thoughtful revision,” concluded CMSA National President Janet Coulter, MSN, MS, RN, CCM, FCM.

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The Case Management Society of America (CMSA) facilitates the growth and development of professional case managers across the full health care continuum, promoting high quality, ethical practice benefiting patients and their families. We strive for improved health outcomes by providing evidence-based resources, impacting health care policy and sustaining the CMSA-developed Standards of Practice for Case Management.

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