ADA®

STUDENT LOAN RESOURCE GUIDE

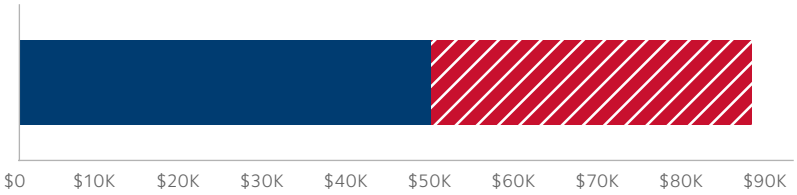
Helping Dental Students and Their Families Navigate New Student Loan Changes

Effective July 1, 2026, the federal landscape for student aid is changing. For dental students, the elimination of Grad PLUS and new borrowing caps may create a significant funding challenge. Use this dashboard to understand your gap and find your path forward.

Calculate Your Funding Gap

Under the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBB), federal borrowing for professional students is capped at $50,000 annually. With dental COA (Cost of Attendance) averaging $88,000, identifying your personal "gap" is the first priority.

Visualizing the 2026-27 Average Dental Cost of Attendance vs. OBBB Limits



Source: Department of Education

Critical Borrowing Changes

The OBBB replaces unlimited Grad PLUS with strict federal caps.

Grad PLUS Eliminated

The Graduate PLUS loan program is entirely terminated. You can no longer borrow up to the full COA through the federal government.

$50k Annual Cap

Direct Unsubsidized loans are now capped at $50,000 per year for professional students. Eligibility is prorated if below full-time.

Aggregate Limits

Professional school cap: $200,000.

Absolute lifetime cap (including undergrad): $257,500

The Exemption Clause

IF you received a federal loan in a specified degree program before June 30, 2026,

THEN you are temporarily exempt from new federal borrowing rules while enrolled in that same degree program

UNTIL the sooner of three academic years or completion of your degree program.

Always consult with your school's financial aid office before making long-term borrowing decisions.

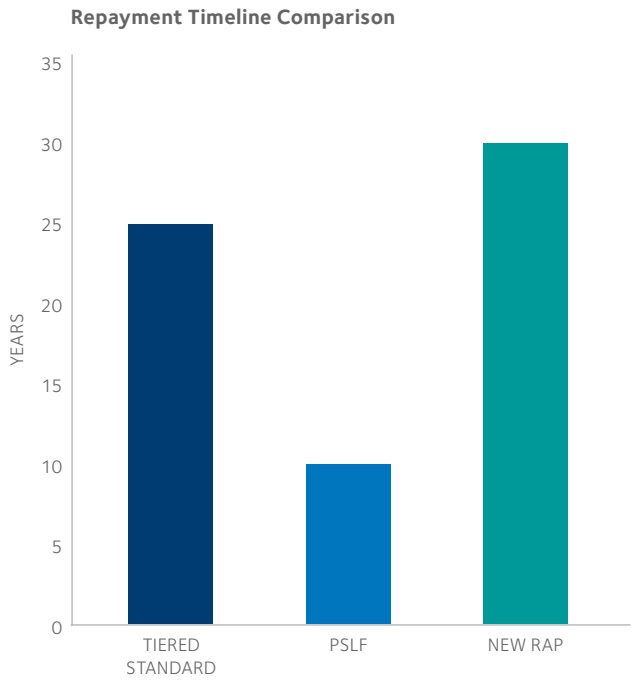
© 2026 American Dental Association. All rights reserved.

Updated: June 16, 2026

The New Repayment Assistance Plan (RAP)

The OBBB terminates SAVE, PAYE, and old income based repayment (IBR) plans. RAP is now the standard income-driven option. Understanding the timeline is key for long-term financial planning.

1. **10% Discretionary Income Cap**
   RAP payments are based on income and family size, generally ranging from 1% to 10% of income, with a dependent reduction.
2. **30-Year Forgiveness Horizon**
   Remaining balances are forgiven after 360 qualifying payments (30 years).
3. **PSLF Persistence**
   Public Service Loan Forgiveness remains at 10 years (120 payments) for nonprofit or qualifying government employees.



Closing the Funding Gap

Explore these primary sources for alternative dental school funding.

Private Lending

Free consultation options available through ADA's partnership with KeyBank.

Learn More

NHSC Scholarship

Full tuition and stipend in exchange for 2+ years of service in underserved health professional shortage areas.

Explore

PSLF Programs

Loan forgiveness provided for those pursuing careers in the governmental or non profit sector.

See More

Military (HPSP)

Covers 100% tuition + monthly stipend. Requires active duty service post-graduation (Army, Navy, Air Force, etc.).

Options

Student Loan Information

Supplement your understanding of the student loan changes.

ADA Student Loan Page

Resources and advocacy

See ADA

ASDA Guidance

Resources for dental students

Visit ASDA

ADEA Educational Debt Information

Facts & figures

ADEA Info

Dept. of Education Updates

Up to date student loan information

Visit ED

Private loans may not carry the same federal protections, repayment options, or forgiveness eligibility as federal loans.

© 2026 American Dental Association. All rights reserved.