

HB 860: Rural Montana Veterinary Workforce Act (RMVWA)

Sponsor: Rep. Randyn Gregg

Purpose: HB 860 establishes a veterinary training loan reimbursement program to address the shortage of veterinarians in rural and underserved areas of Montana. Participants receive up to \$100,000 in tuition reimbursement in exchange for a four-year service commitment in underserved areas.

Background: Modeled After Kansas Program

HB 860 is based on the successful Veterinary Training Program for Rural Kansas (est. 2006), which has demonstrated long-term rural retention:

- 89 students enrolled (50 male, 39 female)
- 98% fulfilled or are fulfilling service obligation
- 94% remained in qualifying counties after 4 years
- 77% still in their original practice location
- In 2022, Kansas increased annual loan amounts from \$20,000 to \$25,000

Eligibility & Program Details

Administered by: The Commissioner of Higher Education (OCHE)

Participant Requirements:

- Enrolled in an accredited DVM program
- Completed at least one term in good standing
- Montana residency preferred
- No prior loan default

Loan Reimbursement Structure:

- 4-Year Program: \$25,000/year (max \$100,000)
- 3-Year Program: \$33,333/year (max \$100,000)
- Payments begin after student completes first semester

Service Commitment:

- Obtain Montana veterinary license within 180 days of graduation
- Practice full-time in an underserved area for four years

Program Duration:

- The program includes a ten-year sunset clause. With consistent participation, it is projected to support 28–32 students over that period, depending on the mix of three-year and four-year veterinary programs.

Example: Individual Participant Scenario

1. Enrolls in a 4-year DVM program in July 2025
 - a. Annual tuition: **\$75,000**; total tuition and living expenses over four years is **\$300,000**

2. Completes one semester, is in good standing, applies for RMVWA, and is selected
3. Receives RMVWA support starting April 2026
4. Receives \$25,000/year for 4 years = **\$100,000** total
5. Remaining balance at graduation = **\$200,000**

Compliance & Enforcement

Participants sign a service agreement.

If a participant defaults:

- Repayment required, prorated by time served
- Interest (up to 8%) and administrative costs may apply
- Full repayment must occur within 10 years

Estimated Program Costs

Assumptions vary by program length and number of students. Below are two key scenarios:

Scenario 1: 3-Year Program – 4 Participants per Cohort

Fiscal Year	Students per Year	Cost per Participant per Year	Annual Cost	Biennium Total
2026	4 (Year 1)	\$33,333 (rounded to \$35,000)	\$140,000	
2027	8 (Years 1 & 2)	\$35,000	\$280,000	\$420,000
2028	12 (Years 1-3)	\$35,000	\$420,000	
2029	12 (Years 2-4)	\$35,000	\$420,000	\$840,000

Scenario 2: 4-Year Program – 4 Participants per Cohort

Fiscal Year	Students per Year	Cost per Participant per Year	Annual Cost	Biennium Total
2026	4 (Year 1)	\$25,000	\$100,000	
2027	8 (Years 1 & 2)	\$25,000	\$200,000	\$300,000
2028	12 (Years 1-3)	\$25,000	\$300,000	
2029	16 (Years 1-4)	\$25,000	\$400,000	\$700,000