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Survey: Graduating residents' debt levels off, salaries rise modestly

by from the AAP Department of Research

After rising sharply over many years, the growth in pediatric residents' educational debt has leveled off, according to the 2017 AAP Annual Survey of Graduating Residents.

For over 20 years, the survey has been sent to a nationally representative sample of residents graduating from U.S. pediatric programs to gather key information on residency training, career choice and job search experiences.

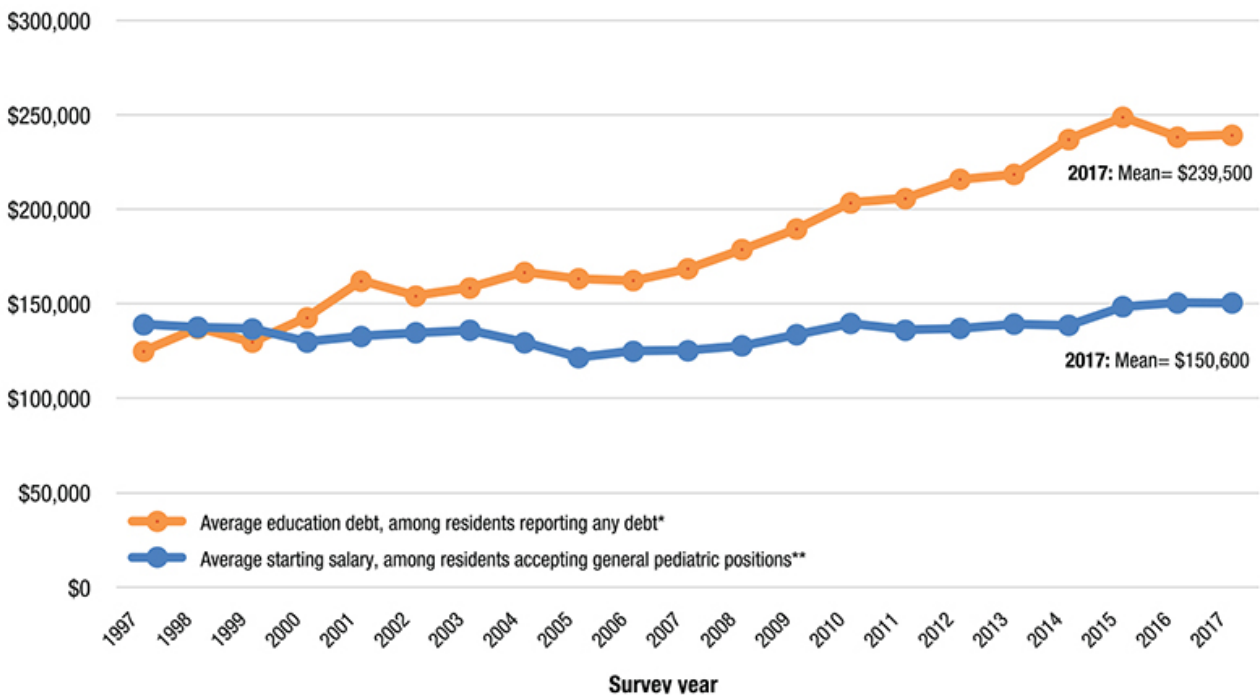
Two striking trends that have emerged across the last two decades are educational debt level and starting salaries.

- Each year, about three-fourths of residents report that they have educational debt.
- The average level of educational debt among residents who report having debt and after adjusting for inflation rose 99% between 1997 and 2015, from \$125,000 to \$249,000 (see figure). Data indicate that debt leveled off in 2016 and 2017, after adjusting for inflation. In 2017, average educational debt was \$239,500.
- In contrast, the starting salaries for graduates entering general pediatric practice have stayed relatively flat, after adjusting for inflation: \$139,200 in 1997 and \$138,700 in 2014 (see figure).
- Since 2015, starting salaries have increased modestly and for the first-time, average starting salaries are over \$150,000 for graduating residents going into primary care practice in 2016 and 2017.



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Average educational debt and starting salary among graduating pediatric residents,* 1997-2017



* Educational debt has been adjusted for inflation and includes spouse/partner debt, if applicable. About one-quarter of residents each year report no debt and are not included in average debt.

**Starting salary has been adjusted for inflation, includes both full-time and part-time positions, and excludes bonuses and benefits.

Source: AAP Annual Survey of Graduating Residents, 1997-2017

Other important trends are that nearly all residents have a job when they graduate (94% in 1997 and 98% in 2017) and are satisfied with their residency training (94% in 1997 and 2017).

"Academy leadership values what we learn from graduating residents and are grateful to those who respond to the resident survey," said Shawn P. Batlivala, M.D., M.S.C.I., FAAP, chair of the AAP Section on Early Career Physicians Executive Committee. "For example, the knowledge that many residents leave residency with six-figure debt loads helps us shape future programs and services to optimize member value. I am encouraged to learn that starting salaries are rising and that most residents graduate with a job or fellowship established."

The Academy uses survey results for program development and strategic planning, and results have been disseminated widely at conferences and in peer-reviewed journals.

The Annual Survey of Graduating Residents is conducted each year from May to August. Surveys are mailed and emailed to a random sample of 1,000 graduating pediatric residents. Response rates have ranged from 78% in 1997 to 53% in 2017.

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- [For more information on the Annual Survey of Graduating Residents, visit <http://www2.aap.org/research/graduatingsurvey.htm> or contact Mary Pat Frintner, in the AAP Division of Health Services Research, at 630-626-6664 or \[mfrintner@aap.org\]\(mailto:mfrintner@aap.org\).](#)
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