



One Prince Street
Alexandria, VA 22314-3318
☎ 703.838.0033
✉ 703.548.1890

2026 Issue Brief

Addressing the Nation's Provider Shortage

Issue

Addressing the nation's provider shortage issue is essential due to the increasing demand for healthcare services associated with the rapidly aging population, physician shortages, and increasing healthcare costs.

Graduate Medical Education (GME)

Physicians graduating as an MD or DO will spend three to seven years in a residency program. Much of the funding for these programs comes from Medicare in the form of direct payments (to cover the cost of educating the residents) or indirect payments (to cover the cost of treating complex patients at teaching hospitals). Medicare provides over \$16 billion annually for GME funding, covering approximately 75% of residency training costs.ⁱ There is a projected shortage of 141,160 full-time equivalent (FTE) physicians in 2038.ⁱⁱ In fact, 30 out of the 35 physician specialties reported in this brief are projected to have shortages in 2038.ⁱⁱⁱ Congress must address projected shortages now so that patients can access care they need in the future.

Multispecialty medical groups and integrated delivery systems feature a large number of physicians and require an adequate pool of residency-trained physicians to meet the increasing demand from the patient population. Despite the growing need due to the aging population, Congress only slightly increased the number of residency slots under Section 126 of the *Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021*.^{iv} However, almost half of the expanded slots created under the law remain undistributed.^v Unless Congress lifts the cap on federally funded residency slots, there will not be enough physicians to care for the growing elderly population as well as replace the currently aging physician workforce.

Public Service Loan Forgiveness

Medical school student loan forgiveness programs were designed to ease the heavy financial burden faced by healthcare professionals who often graduate with significant debt. One of the most prominent options is the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program, which forgives remaining federal student loan balances after 10 years of qualifying payments while working full-time for a nonprofit or government employer—this often includes hospitals, clinics, or academic medical centers.^{vi} However, a recent survey found that only 34% of medical students with debt plan to pursue the PSLF program.^{vii} Congress should place more focus on reforming current medical student loan repayment programs to encourage more medical student participation.

H-1B Visas

In addition to ensuring that the nation continues to train the next generation of clinicians, Congress must ensure that there are enough existing trained providers to support the nation's current provider shortage. The H-1B visa program is vital for the U.S. physician workforce, enabling hospitals, health systems, community clinics, and physician groups to fill critical staffing gaps in rural, underserved, and shortage areas.^{viii} However, increases in H-1B Visa administrative fees threaten access to physician-led care for patients nationwide, due to a new one-

time **\$100,000 fee** for any *new* H-1B visa petition.^{ix} Congress must ensure that physicians and other healthcare professionals are exempted from the current H-1B Visa increased fee.

Increase Advanced Practice Practitioners and Physician Assistant Workforce

Advanced practice practitioners (APPs)—including nurse practitioners, physician assistants/associates, certified registered nurse anesthetists, and clinical nurse specialists—play an increasingly vital role in delivering care across the healthcare system, particularly in rural communities, and medically underserved areas. As physician shortages continue to grow and demand for healthcare services rises due to an aging population and increasing chronic disease burden, APPs have become essential members of team-based care models that expand patient access, improve care coordination, and help reduce provider burnout. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, APP-related professions are projected to grow by nearly 28% over the next eight years.^x

Recent changes to federal student loan program borrowing limits, including the exclusion of advanced nursing degree programs and physician assistants from the definition of “professional student,” will limit the ability to pursue advanced degrees, which would lead to critical gaps in our nation’s healthcare workforce. Congress must reverse the recent student loan borrowing limits and broaden the definition of “professional students” to ensure the nation can continue to produce the workforce needed for high-quality patient care.^{xi}

AMGA Asks Congress to:

- **Approve H.R. 3890/S. 2439, the Resident Physician Shortage Reduction Act of 2025, which would add 14,000 Medicare-supported medical residency positions over seven years**
- **Strengthen current student loan forgiveness programs for primary care and sub-specialty providers through the PSLF program**
- **Exempt physicians and other healthcare professionals from increased H-1B Visa fees**
- **Reverse student loan borrowing limits to maintain a robust healthcare workforce**



ⁱ Office, U.S. Government Accountability. “Physician Workforce: Caps on Medicare-Funded Graduate Medical Education at Teaching Hospitals.” Physician Workforce: Caps on Medicare-Funded Graduate Medical Education at Teaching Hospitals | U.S. GAO, U.S. Government Accountability Office, 21 May 2001, www.gao.gov/products/gao-21-391.

ⁱⁱ “Physician Workforce: Projections, 2023-2038.” The National Center for Health Workforce Analysis, Health Resources and Service Administration, bhw.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/bureau-health-workforce/data-research/physicians-projections-factsheet.pdf. Accessed 11 May 2026.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid

^{iv} Ibid

^v U.S. Department of Education. (2023). Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) Program. <https://studentaid.gov/manage-loans/forgiveness-cancellation/public-service>

^{vii} Murphy, Brendan. “Most Graduating Medical Students Skip Loan-Forgiveness Options.” American Medical Association, AMA, 12 June 2023, www.ama-assn.org/medical-students/medical-student-finance/most-graduating-medical-students-skip-loan-forgiveness.

^{viii} “H-1B Program.” DOL, U.S. Department of Labor, www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/immigration/h1b. Accessed 12 May 2026.

^{ix} “Restriction on Entry of Certain Nonimmigrant Workers.” The White House, The United States Government, 19 Sept. 2025, www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/09/restriction-on-entry-of-certain-nonimmigrant-workers/

^x Nurse Anesthetists, Nurse Midwives, and Nurse Practitioners.” *U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics*, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 28 Aug. 2025, www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/nurse-anesthetists-nurse-midwives-and-nurse-practitioners.htm.

^{xi} “Notice of Proposed Rulemaking – Reimagining and Improving Student Education (RISE) .” AMGA, AMGA, 2 Mar. 2026, amga.org/getmedia/92a52d48-6c2a-494c-b10a-c7f2ac8b9e23/amga-comment-on-reimaging-student-educations-nprm-3-2-26-letter-final.pdf.