

The program is administered by each state's Department of Health or its equivalent. This means each state has its own application process, requirements, and timeline, which has allowed states to limit the eligibility of recipients to primary care physician without considering applications for practicing as a specialist, while other states may informally prioritize primary care providers over specialists.⁶ Furthermore, due to the 30-per-state limitation and varying application processes and prioritizations, some states experience high levels of competition for waivers, while other states do not utilize the full 30 allotted to them each year. Iowa is one such state that experiences high levels of competition, as all 30 allotted slots were placed for the 2021-2022 application cycle.

Why is this important?

The physician workforce shortage is a problem Iowa is currently facing. A problem that will likely worsen as the population of Iowans projected to be 65 years or older increases, along with the associated ailments of aging, which will require higher levels of care and more physicians to cover these demands. Increasing the number of J-1 visa waivers for IMG physicians will help alleviate the disproportionate patient-to-physician ratio and provide access to necessary healthcare for individuals – especially those in rural areas.

Recommendations/What should policymakers do?

1. Improve the utilization of the nationwide allotment of J-1 visa waivers.
 - o Distribute a states unutilized waiver(s) at the end of the application cycle to states that used their allotment and still have a wait list of applicants.
2. Increase the available J-1 visa waivers a state is given each year under the Conrad 30 program.
3. Combination of improving utilization and increasing allotted waivers; states receive additional waivers each year and unused waivers are distributed among states that use all their waivers.

Iowa Implications

Increasing the number of J-1 visa waivers available can immediately impact the physician shortage. Iowa placed all 30 slots during the previous application cycle, so there is a clear and available population of IMG physicians seeking to practice in Iowa, only limited by the number of available waivers. Therefore, by increasing the available J-1 waivers, Iowa can increase the presence of physicians in underserved areas, provide access to the necessary treatment many of these areas need, increase diversity among the physician workforce, and potentially decrease language and culture barriers between patients and physicians.

Sources

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