



Thank you for inviting the Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG) to provide comment to the important work of the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship's hearing on physician immigration. As the only organization in the United States charged with both certifying the credentials of physicians who attend medical schools outside of the United States and sponsoring foreign national physicians for participation in the U.S. Department of State's [BridgeUSA](#) exchange visitor program, ECFMG is uniquely qualified to comment on the contributions of international medical graduates (IMGs) to U.S. health care.

ECFMG, a non-governmental, tax exempt entity, was formed over seventy years ago to be the only organization to certify physicians who graduated from medical schools outside of the United States and Canada and aim to engage in supervised patient care in the United States. Through its many programs and services, ECFMG presently serves as a world leader in promoting quality health care globally — serving physicians, members of the medical education and regulatory communities, health care consumers, and those researching issues in medical education and health workforce planning. Furthermore, ECFMG serves as the primary source for physician immigration data in the United States. Through its many programs and services, ECFMG does the following:

- Certifies the readiness of IMGs for entry into graduate medical education and health care systems in the United States through an evaluation of their qualifications.
- Identifies the needs of IMGs to become acculturated into U.S. health care.
- Verifies credentials and provides other services to health care professionals worldwide.
- Expands knowledge about international medical education programs and their graduates by gathering data, conducting research, and disseminating the findings.
- Facilitates the entry of foreign national physicians to the United States on J-1 visas.

ECFMG certification remains the standard by which IMGs are vetted. In administering its certification program, ECFMG is guided by three mindful principles:

- To assure the U.S. public that those IMG's who are involved in supervised patient care are appropriately certified and hold credentials that have been primary source verified;
- To assure residency program directors there is an adequate pool of qualified IMG applicants;
- To facilitate, and not impede, IMGs seeking professional career advancement.

Currently, all U.S. states require IMGs to hold ECFMG certification and to have one to three years of training before being eligible for an unrestricted medical license. While not an ECFMG regulation, our organization supports these requirements, because the residency training outside of the United States is very heterogenous and frequently not regulated. In order to engage in required U.S. training, each foreign national physician is selected through a highly competitive [matching program](#) and has their eligibility status verified by ECFMG prior to being selected.

Ensuring that physicians are qualified and able to enter the United States and complete training is essential to both U.S. and global health care. Key points related to physician

immigration include:

- The United States remains the premier country for the training of physicians
- The United States is suffering from a physician shortage with forecasts of a widening gap that will continue to grow over the next decade. The Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) predicts that, by 2033, the United States will experience a shortage of between 54,100 and 139,000 physicians. This number includes a projected primary care physician shortage of between 21,400 and 55,200 as well as a shortage of non-primary care specialty physicians of between 33,700 and 86,700.<sup>1</sup> With more than 40 percent of international medical graduates working in primary care, the US needs to continue to maintain policies that encourage foreign national physicians to come to the United States for training.
- Physician immigration is a matter of national security. Foreign national physicians provide important patient care in medically underserved areas of the United States.
- Any review of physician immigration must consider the burden of United States Customs and Immigration Enforcement (USCIS) [processing times](#). Overall USCIS average processing times have increased by 46 percent over the past two fiscal years and 91 percent since fiscal year 2014. This directly impacts physician immigration in the United States.
- More than 900,000 Americans have died from COVID-19 and infections continue to touch all parts of American life. States with the highest numbers of foreign national physicians are those hardest hit by COVID-19, including New York, Michigan, Texas, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and Florida. Ensuring an uninterrupted frontline health care workforce is critically important.

ECFMG urges policymakers to consider the impacts that foreign national physicians have on patient care in the United States and carefully evaluate their contributions to U.S. health care. As the leading experts on the credentialing and visa sponsorship of foreign national physicians, ECFMG remains available to advise policy makers on this important public diplomacy matter.

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<sup>1</sup> AAMC. (2020, June). *The Complexities of Supply and Demand: Projections from 2018 to 2033*. Retrieved from AAMC: <https://www.aamc.org/system/files/2020-06/stratcomm-aamc-physician-workforce-projections-june-2020.pdf>