

Workforce Shortages/Graduate Medical Education

Key Takeaway: *The United States will face an overall shortage of nearly 100,000 physicians by 2025, with half of that shortage coming from specialty physicians. Congress must act now to increase the number of residency slots to ensure access to specialty care.*

The Alliance of Specialty Medicine urges Congress to address the workforce shortages in many specialties that will jeopardize access to care by cosponsoring the bipartisan “**Resident Physician Shortage Reduction Act**” (H.R. 2124/S. 1148) introduced by Reps. Joseph Crowley (D-NY) and Charles Boustany, MD (R-LA); and Sens. Bill Nelson (D-FL) and Charles Schumer (D-NY).

Legislation. The “**Resident Physician Shortage Reduction Act**” will improve the nation’s GME system and help to preserve access to specialty care by:

- Increasing the number of Medicare-supported GME residency slots by 15,000 over the next 5 years;
- Directing half of the newly available positions to training in shortage specialties;
- Specifying priorities for distributing the new slots (e.g., states with new medical schools); and
- Studying the needs of the U.S. healthcare system and allocating residencies accordingly.

Snapshot of the Issue. According to a 2015 report by the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), the United States will face an overall shortage of between 46,000-90,000 physicians by 2025. Specialty shortages will be particularly large, including neurosurgeons, urologists, cardiologists, gastroenterologists, plastic and reconstructive surgeons, and orthopaedic surgeons. A 2008 report by the Health Resources and Services Administration found that by 2020, ophthalmology and orthopedic surgery are each expected to need more than 6,000 physicians over current levels, while other specialties like urology will see shortfalls of more than 4,000 physicians. Growth in future demand for physicians will be highest among specialties that predominantly serve the elderly.

Specialty physicians require up to seven years of post-graduate residency training. By the time crisis further manifests itself, we will be unable to quickly correct it. With 10,000 seniors aging into the Medicare program every day, along with the influx of patients seeking access to care as a result of the Affordable Care Act, the need for specialist services will increase significantly. We must take steps now to ensure a fully trained specialty physician workforce for the future.