



Demand for Health-Care Workers during the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond: Where Do Immigrants and Refugees Fit In?

October 7, 2020 | 12 to 2:15 pm EST

Before the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting labor market disruptions even in the historically recession-proof health-care industry, discussions about the demand for health-care professionals generally focused on two pressure points: One was the aging of the U.S. population along with the retirement of a large number of health-care professionals. The second issue had to do with the uneven distribution of health services and resources that results in inadequate access to care among rural populations, people lacking health insurance, minority communities, and immigrant families without legal status. Both government and industry projections suggested a greater need for health-care workers across skill levels in the next decade. Despite these pressures, according to the Migration Policy Institute (MPI), 263,000 immigrants with health-related college degrees faced significant barriers to credentialing and employment.

The COVID-19 pandemic exerted its own set of pressures. The first was the initial shock of intense demand for frontline workers fighting COVID-19. States tried to tap into various pools of health-care professionals by calling in retired doctors and early graduates of medical schools, among others. Governors in eight states have used their executive authority to temporarily suspend or adjust licensing requirements for certain health professions, including for internationally trained health-care professionals. States began to invest in contact tracing as a way to stem the virus' spread. At the same time, the ban on elective procedures and a precipitous drop in the number of patients coming to private medical offices and community clinics led to 1.4 million lost jobs in the health sector between January and April.

As states are reopening their economies the number of coronavirus cases has risen significantly, and experts warn about future waves. At the same time, health-care employment is also on the rise. Looking to the future, what are the pre-coronavirus and the COVID-19-related trends that are likely to persist as the sector recalibrates? How will they shape the demand for health-care workers in the near- to medium-term future? And where do the 263,000 immigrant and refugee health-care professionals in the United States—who bring both professional knowledge and language and cultural skills—fit?

To consolidate and exchange knowledge about these issues, MPI, with support from Open Society Foundations, will hold an online, invitation-only forum with medical and public-health professionals, hospital administrators, labor market and health policy experts, and organizations promoting the integration of immigrant professionals. The meeting has two main objectives. The first goal is to identify key trends in demand for health-care professionals in the United States by mapping the specific positions and skills that will be in demand given both long-term and COVID-19-driven trends. The second is to discuss the implications these trends may hold for rapid credentialing and employment of underemployed immigrant and other health-care professionals.

AGENDA

12:00 pm – 12:10 pm

Welcoming Remarks and Introductions

Dr. Jeanne Batalova

Senior Policy Analyst and MPI Data Hub Manager, Migration Policy Institute

Dr. José Ramón Fernández-Peña

President-Elect of the American Public Health Association; Director, Health Professions Advising, Northwestern University

12:10 pm – 12:45 pm

Session I. Setting the Context: Update on the COVID Crisis and Its Disparate Population Impacts

This session will explore the most recent COVID-19 trends and likely developments focusing on the size and characteristics of the population contracting and dying from COVID-19 by race, age, language, income, and state. It will also explore the impacts on differing racial and economic groups, on rural communities, and on mental health.

Michael Fix (moderator)

Senior Fellow and former President of the Migration Policy Institute

Dr. Catherine Troisi

Associate Professor in the Division of Management, Policy, and Community Health and Epidemiology at University of Texas School of Public Health and Coordinator for the Leadership Studies Concentration

Dr. Leo Morales

Professor, Director of the Center for Health Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in the School of Medicine, and Co-Director of the Latino Center for Health in the School of Public Health, University of Washington School of Medicine

Leslie Marsh

Chief Executive Officer, Lexington Regional Health Center

Dr. Sergio Aguilar-Gaxiola

Director, University of California Davis Center for Reducing Health Disparities

OPEN DISCUSSION

12:45 pm – 1:25 pm

Session II. Understanding Current and Emerging Sources of Supply and Demand for Health-Care Workers

This session will explore the following questions:

- What trends (e.g., population aging, retirements, telemedicine) will affect demand for health-care providers in the near and intermediate term? Beyond physicians, nurses, and physician assistants, what will demand for mental-health, public-health, and other professionals be?
- What might we predict about staffing demand given what we know about COVID-19's spread? How is this demand for testing, treatment, and contact tracing likely to evolve? What are the implications for mental-health needs?
- What occupations within the sector are likely to grow or decline in response to both existing and COVID-19-related trends?

Ignatius Bau (moderator)

Health Care Policy Consultant

Dr. Joanne Spetz

Brenda and Jeffrey L. Kang Presidential Chair in Healthcare Finance at the Philip R. Lee Institute for Health Policy Studies (IHPS); Associate Director for Research at IHPS and at Healthforce Center at the University of California San Francisco

Dr. Allison Squires

Associate Professor and Director of the Florence S. Downs PhD Program in Nursing Research & Theory Development at New York University Rory Meyers College of Nursing

Dr. Leighton Ku

Professor at the Department of Health Policy and Management; Director, Center for Health Policy Research at the Milken Institute School of Public Health, George Washington University

Katie Bollbach

Director of the U.S. Public Health Accompaniment Unit, Partners In Health

OPEN DISCUSSION

1:25 pm – 2:05 pm

Session III. Implications for the Rapid Credentialing and Employment of Underemployed Internationally Trained Immigrant and Refugee Health-Care Professionals

This session will address the following questions:

- What are the implications of the coronavirus crisis for the integration of underemployed international health professionals in the United States?
- What lessons can we identify from the state-led initiatives to facilitate access of internationally trained health-care professionals? What else can states do?
- Where can the federal and state governments play a bigger role?

Dr. José Ramón Fernández-Peña (moderator)

Mike Zimmer

Senior Policy Consultant at World Education Services, Global Talent Bridge

Carrie Miller

Program Manager, Colorado Welcome Back

Robin Dunn Marcos

Senior Director for Resettlement, Asylum and Integration, International Rescue Committee

OPEN DISCUSSION

2:05 pm – 2:15 pm

Looking Ahead

Gregory Maniatis

Director of the International Migration Initiative, Open Society Foundations

Michael Fix

MPI Publications and Data Resources

[As U.S. Health-Care System Buckles under Pandemic, Immigrant & Refugee Professionals Could Represent a Critical Resource](#)

[Brain Waste among U.S. Immigrants with Health Degrees: A Multi-State Profile](#)

[Immigrant Health-Care Workers in the United States](#)

[College-Educated Immigrants in the United States](#)

[Other Brain Waste & Credential Recognition Resources](#)

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Resources](#)

[Immigrant Profiles & Demographics](#)

Additional support for the Migration Policy Institute's ongoing work on the underemployment of internationally trained health professionals is being provided by the Walder Foundation.