

THE OPIOID WORKFORCE ACT OF 2021

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The Opioid Workforce Act of 2021 (S. 1483) addresses the nation's opioid crisis by funding 1,000 Medicare-reimbursed residency positions in teaching hospitals that have or are in the process of establishing approved residency programs in addiction medicine, addiction psychiatry, or pain medicine. This bipartisan Senate bill is being led by Senators Maggie Hassan (D-NH) and Susan Collins (R-ME). The House is expected to introduce a similar version of the legislation.

GNHYHA strongly supports the Opioid Workforce Act of 2021 and urges Congress to pass this vital legislation.

Every American in need of substance use treatment should have access to it. Most states have reported increases in substance use and opioid-related mortality since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the highest number of drug overdose deaths ever recorded in the US in a 12-month period (81,000) occurred from May 2019 to May 2020.

While the nation already faced a gap for individuals with substance use disorders receiving treatment—some 20.4 million people needed substance use treatment in 2019 but only 4.2 million received any—the COVID-19 pandemic increased the immense demand for substance use treatment services. Existing and looming physician shortages worsen potential access issues.

The Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) projects that the United States will face a shortage of as many as 139,000 physicians by 2033. The COVID-19 pandemic has magnified the need to address shortfalls in primary and specialty care. Current Medicare payment policy presents a barrier to training physicians, including those specializing in addiction medicine, addiction psychiatry, and pain medicine. While medical schools have expanded their class sizes to address shortages, residency positions for graduates to complete their training have not grown at the same pace. The disparity is largely due to a two-decade cap on Medicare support for physician training.

The addition of residency positions in these specific specialties would increase an extremely vulnerable population's access to high-quality care and strengthen our health care infrastructure by increasing the number of doctors serving on the frontlines of the nation's opioid crisis.

In addition to the Opioid Workforce Act of 2021, GNYHA supports the bipartisan Resident Physician Shortage Reduction Act of 2021 (H.R. 2256/S. 834), which would increase the number of Medicare-reimbursed residency positions by 14,000 over seven years. Together, these bills will help teaching hospitals meet local and national workforce needs, including the disciplines needed to address the opioid crisis.



GNHYHA is a dynamic, constantly evolving center for health care advocacy and expertise, but our core mission—helping hospitals deliver the finest patient care in the most cost-effective way—never changes.