

GREATER NEW YORK HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION

555 WEST 57TH STREET, NEW YORK, NY 10019 • T (212) 246-7100 • F (212) 262-6350 • WWW.GNYHA.ORG • PRESIDENT, KENNETH E. RASKE

April 9, 2021

VIA EMAIL: HELPWorkforceComments@help.senate.gov

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee

The Honorable Richard Burr
Ranking Member
Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee

RE: GNYHA Recommendations for Addressing Workforce Needs of the Health Care and Public Health Sectors

On behalf of the 200 voluntary and public hospitals and nursing facilities in New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, and Rhode Island that make up the membership of the Greater New York Hospital Association (GNYHA), we appreciate the opportunity to provide these proposals in response to the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee's request for input on how to enhance or improve workforce training in direct relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, including ways to address workforce needs of the health care and public health sectors; and strategies to encourage innovation to address worker and industry needs.

While many industries continue to suffer from the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, certain vulnerabilities in the health workforce were highlighted as the nation focused on surging patient care demands. The challenges faced by those on the frontlines of the pandemic have highlighted rising concerns of health workforce burnout. America's health care organizations are investing in physician and health care worker training and leading innovations in new, more efficient care delivery models that include better use of technologies to improve access to care. Even with these investments in training and innovation, however, as the country begins to recover, there is no better time for the Federal government to invest in programs that develop tomorrow's health care workforce, fortify the nation's health care infrastructure, and provide new opportunities for committed individuals seeking to join or strengthen their role in the health care workforce.

Providing Physician Workforce Development Opportunities

According to the Association of American Medical Colleges, the need for physicians continues to grow faster than supply, leading to an estimated shortfall of between 54,100 and 139,000 primary care and specialty physicians by 2033.¹ This projection is particularly alarming given concerns about the impact of physician retirement, which burnout may accelerate. Additionally, the US population continues to both grow and age, and access issues persist in rural and underserved areas.

¹ <https://www.aamc.org/data-reports/workforce/report/physician-workforce-projections>

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There is no doubt that shortages and access challenges will persist unless the Federal government takes actions to expand the physician workforce.

Invest in Medicare Support for Physician Training

GNYHA strongly supports *The Resident Physician Shortage Reduction Act of 2021 (S. 834)*. This bipartisan legislation is crucial to expanding the physician workforce and ensuring that patients across the country can access the care they need. The vast majority of GNYHA members are teaching hospitals, including the nation's largest concentration of academic medical centers and other teaching hospitals. GNYHA teaching hospital members train approximately 18,000 physician residents, and New York has the highest number of residents in training of all 50 states. The premier teaching hospitals of New York and surrounding states are proud to produce physicians for the entire country. For that reason, GNYHA takes special interest in efforts to increase the physician workforce pipeline.

GNYHA is grateful that bipartisan congressional leaders worked together to provide 1,000 new Medicare-supported graduate medical education (GME) positions in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021—the first increase of its kind in nearly 25 years. This critical workforce development provision addressed the longstanding problem that the Balanced Budget Act of 1997 capped the number of physician residents for which the country's teaching hospitals could receive Medicare funding. *The Resident Physician Shortage Reduction Act of 2021* would build on this historic investment by gradually raising the number of Medicare-supported GME positions by 2,000 per year for seven years, for a total of 14,000 new slots. A share of these positions would be targeted to hospitals in rural areas, hospitals serving patients from health professional shortage areas, hospitals in states with new medical schools or branch campuses, and hospitals already training over their caps.

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated how communities across the country rely on the physicians who dedicate their lives to service and put themselves in harm's way to ensure the health of their patients. These selfless professionals should not have to be stretched further because the Federal government did not do enough to bolster their ranks.

Providing Other Health Workforce Development Opportunities

An important vulnerability that COVID-19 exposed is the need for a more robust health care workforce at all levels who have the education, training, and skills to address the public health needs of their fellow citizens. The threat of recurring surges in infection rates and future public health emergencies underscore the need to support this heroic workforce and to provide opportunities for others to join it through further investment. In the pandemic's early days, for example, hospitals desperately sought to bring in critical care nurses to care for COVID-19 patients. Also early on, hospitals realized that they needed more staff who were certified as respiratory therapists. Unfortunately, it quickly became clear that there were too few individuals with the experience or skills to provide this important care.

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Invest in “Pay for Success” Training Programs

GNYHA strongly supports the authorization and funding of health care-specific “pay for success” programs, which provide job training at no initial cost to the participant. This type of program eliminates a significant financial barrier to workforce development and rewards organizations that can demonstrate success. This model creates a pipeline from the participant to the training program to the employer and makes the participant’s share of the training fee conditional upon hire. The model was recently profiled in the *New York Times*² and should be developed with Federal investments, including a special fund dedicated to those serving in hospital, nursing facility, and other health care settings. With a national program such as this, individuals who had not previously considered a health care career will gain access to often better-paying employment opportunities while serving their community and keeping us safe from unforeseen public health emergencies.

Invest in Health Workforce Training Accounts

GNYHA strongly supports investments in an initiative that would provide training accounts for health care workers that could be used to further develop their education, training, and skills. These programs would incentivize those currently in the health workforce to save for future education and training by matching the health care worker’s investment of pre-tax income. Workers could use funding in their accounts towards a variety of eligible education, certificate, and training programs that provide an avenue to better-paying careers. Workers trained in a variety of positions within the health workforce would have more options and less vulnerability to job obsolescence and would be able to address suddenly arising gaps in care due to a public health emergency. Workers with broader skillsets would also be able to contribute to a more flexible health workforce that responds to shifting delivery system and patient care needs.

Invest in Health Care Digital Literacy and Cybersecurity

GNYHA strongly supports investments in programs that will promote digital literacy and create a pipeline of professionals able to address emerging cybersecurity needs. The health workforce must adjust to changing delivery system, security, and patient care needs, as shown by pandemic response activities. Accelerating automation and heavier reliance on technology-driven efficiencies make digital literacy essential for all sectors of the health workforce. Federal investment in programs that increase digital literacy can create a more resilient health workforce prepared to adapt to shifting and expanding roles. Federal investment in local programs that teach digital literacy can prepare individuals currently in or looking to enter the health workforce for increasingly broader employment expectations, as was discussed in a recent report from the Center for An Urban Future³, an organization that promotes policies that reduce inequality, increase

² Lohr, S. April 7, 2021. Job Training That’s Free Until You’re Hired Is a Blueprint for Biden. *The New York Times*. [Job Training That’s Free Until You’re Hired Is a Blueprint for Biden - The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/07/us/politics/job-training-biden.html).

³ Dvorkin, E., Shaviro, C., and Gallagher, L. March 2021. Upskilling for An Equitable Recovery: Hardest-Hit New Yorkers Most Vulnerable to Automation. *The Center for an Urban Future*. [Upskilling for an Equitable Recovery: Hardest-Hit New Yorkers Most Vulnerable to Automation | Center for an Urban Future \(CUF\) \(nycfuture.org\)](https://www.nycfuture.org/2021/03/23/upskilling-for-an-equitable-recovery/).

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economic mobility, and grow the economy in New York City. These programs could be based at community colleges, local libraries, other community-based organizations, or local governments.

These investments should be combined with an investment in cybersecurity training programs targeted specifically to health care settings. Recent cybersecurity attacks targeting health care organizations have exposed a vulnerability that must be addressed to ensure that our nation's health care and public health infrastructure is well-staffed and can meet the needs of its communities. A dedicated fund for institutions of higher education or training organizations to develop a stronger cybersecurity workforce to work in health care settings would be an important first step in moving the health care system toward a more secure future.

Contact Information

GNYHA is pleased to offer these recommendations to the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee and we applaud the willingness of the Chair, Ranking Member, and other members to work on this important area of need. Those on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic have unquestionably set an example for resilience and fortitude, serving their communities at risk of their own lives. These brave individuals need to be both supplemented and provided with further support. Should you wish to discuss any of GNYHA's recommendations, please contact us at 212-506-5505 or via email at jcooper@gnyha.org or tjohnson@gnyha.org.

Sincerely,



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