

Immigration Reform Will Help Ease Long Term Care Workforce Shortages

Long term care facilities across the nation are ready, willing, and able to offer tens of thousands of good-paying jobs that, if filled, will help boost the quality of care for frail, elderly, and disabled Americans. Unfortunately, our nation's health care system has experienced a shortage of trained caregivers for these critical jobs for some time.

The high demand for long term care workers has been well documented by the federal government and by the American Health Care Association/ National Center for Assisted Living (AHCA/NCAL). A study by the Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) and the Department of Labor (DOL) estimates that the U.S. will need between 5.7 million and 6.5 million nurses, nurse aides, home health, and personal care workers to care for the 27 million Americans who will require long term care in 2050.

A 2008 AHCA study examining staff vacancy rates in our nation's nursing homes found that 43,700 certified nurse assistants (CNAs) were needed just to meet the demand for care at the time the study was released. In addition, this same study estimated that 8,000 staff registered nurse (RN) and 15,600 licensed practical nurse (LPN) positions also were vacant. The shortage of available employment-based visas for foreign trained nurses, primarily from India and the Philippines, severely limits the ability of nursing home providers to bring these nurses to fill those vacancies.

In fact, the current temporary and permanent visa programs are insufficient and inadequate to accommodate the needs of U.S. health care providers. The permanent residence program provides approximately 5,000 annual visas for essential workers. Clearly, current programs cannot handle our continuing need for foreign-born, essential workers.

AHCA/NCAL believes that new immigration laws should serve the needs of the U.S. economy and that policy remedies, which can address immediate needs should be pursued. Specifically, AHCA/NCAL believes that, given the current nurse shortage nationwide, the federal government should consider allowing employers access to previously unused H-1B temporary worker visas. In terms of the broader policy issues around immigration, AHCA/NCAL would support the following approach: if a U.S. employer is offering a job that American citizens are not available to take, we should welcome into our country a person who will fill that job – especially a critical job that has the capacity to improve the health and well-being of America's seniors and people with disabilities.

Ask Congress...

To support comprehensive immigration reform legislation that creates a viable, workable guest worker program; waives the cap on employment-based visas for nurses & physical therapists; and provides for a reliable, real-time system for employers to verify employee status.

Key Facts

- According to HHS & DOL, 5.7 million – 6.5 million nurses, nurse aides, home health & personal care workers will be needed to care for the 27 million Americans will require some type of long term care by 2050.
- About 5,000 visas for essential workers are available each year through the permanent residence program.
- AHCA/NCAL participates alongside 40 other member of EWIC—the Essential Worker Immigration Coalition, which is concerned about the shortage of lesser skilled & unskilled or “essential worker” labor. More at www.ewic.org.

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