

'Punch in the gut': AMA leads effort for physician exemption from H-1B visa fee increase

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Key takeaways:

- The AMA and many other societies requested physician exemption from a new \$100,000 fee on H-1B visa applications.
- The fee could exacerbate a physician shortage and reduce care access in already-underserved areas.

The federal government's plan to charge a \$100,000 application fee for visas used by specialized foreign workers could have devastating consequences for health care delivery unless physicians are exempt, the AMA president told Healio.

"We have a [physician shortage](#) — it is projected to exceed 80,000 in the next decade — and [international medical graduates](#) are one critical solution. The possibility that an H-1B visa could cost \$100,000 is a punch in the gut when we're already falling," **Bobby Mukkamala, MD**, said in an interview. "Physicians exist to improve the health of our country, and this is a major step backward."



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The AMA wrote a letter to U.S. Homeland Security Secretary **Kristi Noem** on Sept. 25 requesting "clarifying guidance" that specifies en...rest" and, therefore, t

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More than 50 other medical societies and organizations co-signed the letter.

“The U.S. health care workforce relies upon physicians from other countries to provide high-quality and accessible patient care,” the letter read. “Accordingly, we must ensure that the U.S. has a fair and efficient immigration system that strengthens U.S. health care and advances the nation’s health security. [We] urge the administration to categorically consider H-1B physicians’ entry into the U.S. to be in the national interest of the country and waive the new application fee so that H-1B physicians can continue to be a pipeline that provides health care to U.S. patients.”

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Visa for ‘specialty occupations’

The H-1B visa program — established in 1990 — allows U.S. employers to temporarily hire skilled foreign workers in “specialty occupations.” These visas often are granted to individuals who work in health care, finance, technology or other fields requiring special skills that may be difficult to find in the U.S.

Some members of Congress have called for reforms to close loopholes to reduce potential for fraud or abuse of the immigration system, increase transparency of foreign worker recruitment and protect American workers from outsourcing of jobs.

A Trump administration proclamation titled “Restriction on Entry of Certain Nonimmigrant Workers” took effect this week, imposing a \$100,000 fee on every new H-1B visa petition. Previously, employers paid approximately \$2,000 to \$5,000 per petition depending on their size.

The proclamation specifies the restriction will not apply to workers or industries if the Department of Homeland Security secretary determines their hiring is in the country’s national interest and poses no threat to the nation’s security or welfare.

The letter the AMA and co-signing societies sent to Noem requested that all physicians — including fellows, residents, researchers and others who work in nonclinical settings — be included in the categories of H-1B workers covered by this exemption.

“We want to be collaborative with the administration and we understand there are situations where this is very important, but it has nothing to do with physicians coming here to serve the health care needs of our country,” Mukkamala told Healio.

Implications for health care

More than 1 in 5 licensed physicians in the U.S. are foreign trained.

As of 2021, approximately 64% of foreign-trained physicians practiced in areas designated as medically underserved or already facing shortages of health professionals, and nearly half practiced in rural areas, according to AMA’s letter.

Failure to exempt physicians from the new H-1B visa fee would further reduce health care access in regions that can least afford it, Mukkamala said.

Prabir Roy-Chaudhury, MD, PhD, FASN, president of the American Society of Nephrology (ASN), an organization that co-signed the letter, started his U.S. medical career with a fellowship at Beth Israel Hospital in Boston in 1993 on a J-1 visa. That was converted to an H-1 visa when he got a position at the University of Cincinnati and worked at the Cincinnati VA.

“ASN feels — to try and vulnerable v

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organizations
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socioeconomic status areas, a lot of the safety net population, if you will. These are groups that are served by international medical graduates, and the vast majority of them would be on H1 visas.”

The American College of Gastroenterology (ACG), another co-signer, has been exploring the effect of these visas on its workforce, according to the organization’s president, **Amy S. Oxentenko, MD, FACP**.

“ACG has heard from members from across the country about staffing challenges and the need for more gastroenterologists and GI care team members, especially in underserved areas of the country,” Oxentenko told Healio. “Almost a year ago, I convened a task force of ACG leaders to review these workforce challenges in GI and develop a set of recommendations to address these issues both for the short term and to lay the groundwork for the future. We are surveying and getting more feedback from members to better scope the issues ... which includes reviewing how many gastroenterologists in the U.S. are on, or started on, a visa.”

The fee change could put maternal health at risk, according to American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology chief of education, workforce and wellbeing, **AnnaMarie Connolly, MD**.

“Every year, thousands of physicians provide care to patients across the U.S. thanks to H-1B visas,” Connolly told Healio. “Many physicians with H-1B visas work in rural or otherwise underserved areas, and, as such, they fill a critical gap in meeting patient needs. As maternity care deserts expand and physician shortages grow, H-1B-supported physicians in the U.S. are playing an increasingly vital role in ensuring patients receive essential care.”

In addition to clinical practice, limiting visas could hamper research, according to Endocrine Society spokesperson **Amanda Megan Bell, MD**.

“The Endocrine Society is alarmed that this proclamation will restrict access to endocrinologists for patients and reduce the number of new scientists from outside the United States from participating in research,” Bell told Healio. “The country is currently facing a shortage of endocrinologists, which has significantly impacted rural and underserved areas of the country. We urge the administration to exempt physicians from these new restrictions because of their role in protecting the national interest and patient health.”

Mukkamala said he is “extremely grateful” to be aligned with the societies and organizations that co-signed the letter.

“If we can show that every physician group in this country — regardless of state or specialty — sees things the same way, then it's much harder to argue anything otherwise,” he said.

He also urged members of the clinical community to contact their lawmakers in support of the exemption.

"Every single physician knows an international medical graduate who is helping them take care of their community, or maybe they are an international medical graduate themselves," he said. "It will only take a split second for them to realize the consequences — for themselves and their patients.”

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AMA urges DHS to exempt physicians from new \$100,000 H-1B visa fee. <https://www.ama-assn.org/press-center/ama-press-releases/ama-urges-dhs-exempt-physicians-new-100000-h-1b-visa-fee>. Published Sept. 25, 2025. Accessed Sept. 26, 2025.

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