

## Lawmakers Seek Additional Immigrant Visas for Doctors, Nurses to Ease Shortage of Healthcare Workers

Article By:

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A bi-partisan group has introduced a new bill in both the House and the Senate that would make additional immigrant visas (green cards) available to doctors and nurses. The Healthcare Workforce Resilience Act (HWRA) would ease the long wait lines for green cards that make the U.S. a less attractive alternative to other countries that are more open to immigration.

The [shortage of healthcare workers in the U.S. is not a new problem](#) – particularly in rural areas of the country. [One in four healthcare workers](#) in the U.S. was born in another country.

Foreign-born doctors [often work in rural areas and fill posts](#) that would go unfilled without them. But the ability of those doctors to continue work in the United States and to help during the COVID-19 pandemic (which has made the shortage a much starker reality) is limited by restrictions on their work visas.

For instance, physicians in H-1B status may not be able to move to an area of the country where cases are spiking, because their visas have geographic restrictions. Others in H-1B status who have received waivers may put their immigration status at risk by providing telehealth services outside of their local area during the COVID-19 National Emergency. Foreign-born nurses are [subject to similar restrictions](#).

USCIS has lifted a few restrictions to accommodate foreign physicians who wish to provide telehealth services and the Department of State is [making it easier for healthcare workers from abroad who wish to fight COVID-19](#) to come to the U.S. Geographic restrictions and the long green card backlog have not been addressed.

The answer may be to make more green cards available to physicians and nurses so that they are no longer subject to the geographic restrictions. And [Congress wants to help](#). The HWRA would make 40,000 immigrant visas available to doctors (15,000) and nurses (25,000). The visas would be issued without regard to per-country restrictions and the Departments of Homeland Security and State would be required to process the petitions and applications quickly.

The congressional representatives have pointed out that these 40,000 new visas would not increase the limited number of immigrant visas, because the legislation would simply call for recapturing visas

from previous years that went unused. In addition, employers who sponsor nurses for these recaptured visas would have to attest that they have not displaced any U.S. workers through the new hires and will not do so.

The President of the American Medical Association in support of the bill said, “Physicians fighting COVID-19 are eager to hear these words: Reinforcements are on the way.” One Congressman pointed out that, [even if the bill passes later](#), it will still help and “would be one of the most important interventions to rebuilding the country in the long term.”

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