

Protect our Care: Physician shortage threatens access to quality health care in communities across the country

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Sen. Bob Menendez (D-NJ) and Sen. John Boozman (R-AR) call on Congress to increase the number of residency slots funded by Medicare—the primary source of payment for doctors-in-training, expanding access to care in rural and urban communities

WISCONSIN — In a [new op-ed in Modern Healthcare](#), Senator John Boozman (R-AR) is urging Congress to fund Graduate Medical Education (GME) at an adequate level to address the doctor shortage crisis facing this country. The Association of American Medical Colleges [estimates](#) the United States will face a shortage of between 37,800 to 124,000 doctors by 2034. Congress can address this through the Build Back Better legislation now working its way through Congress.

In his op-ed, Senator Boozman highlights how the COVID-19 pandemic has left health care providers feeling burned out and exploring new careers outside of the medical field, as demand for access to care increases across the country.

“To ensure we are prepared for future public health emergencies and are able to respond to evolving challenges, we must have a well-trained physician workforce. However, just the opposite is occurring—we face an increasingly growing shortfall.”

To produce one additional physician in a core specialty, a minimum of 3-5 additional GME slots (one for each year of the physician’s training) is needed and for an advanced specialty, 4-8 additional slots are needed. Therefore using AAMC

estimates, funding 10,000 new GME slots projects 2,500 new physicians per year. At this rate it would take 15 years to address the shortage. And if only 8,000 new slots are funded, it will take 19 years. Much too long to wait for adequate access to care.

For years, Senator Boozman and Senator Menendez (D-NJ) have been raising concerns over federal policy that caps the number of Medicare-funded GME positions available to students pursuing a career in the medical field. The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the need for Congressional action to update this policy.

“For more than 20 years, the arbitrary cap on the residency slots funded by Medicare—the primary source of payment for doctors-in-training—has remained unchanged. This has contributed to the provider shortage and also prevented medical school graduates from continuing their training where they want to live and work. As medical school enrollment and graduation rates continue to grow, the Medicare-funded Graduate Medical Education position cap has been a hindrance.”

“For the last several years, my colleague Sen. Bob Menendez (D-N.J.) and I have been leading legislative efforts for change. We recently introduced the [Resident Physician Shortage Reduction Act](#) to lift the cap on the number of Medicare-funded GME positions and increase the number by an additional 14,000 over seven years. Our bill will enable us to better provide access to quality healthcare in rural and urban communities.”

Access to quality health care has never been more important, and the physician shortage threatens the health and wellbeing of folks in rural and urban communities across the country. The path forward is clear: Congress must lift the cap on Medicaid funded GME positions available.

You can read Senator Boozman’s op-ed [here](#), and learn more about the Resident Physician Shortage Reduction Act [here](#).