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New Findings Confirm Predictions on Physician Shortage

The United States will see a shortage of up to nearly 122,000 physicians by 2032 as demand for physicians continues to grow faster than supply, according to new data published today by the AAMC (Association of American Medical Colleges). The projected shortfall is similar to past projections and ranges from 46,900 to 121,900 physicians.

“The nation’s population is growing and aging, and as we continue to address population health goals like reducing obesity and tobacco use, more Americans will live longer lives. These factors and others mean we will need more doctors,” said AAMC President and CEO Darrell G. Kirch, MD. “Even with new ways of delivering care, America’s doctor shortage continues to remain real and significant.”

Conducted by the Life Science division of IHS Markit, a global information company, this fifth annual study, *The Complexities of Physician Supply and Demand: Projections from 2017-2032*, includes scenarios that have been refined and updated based on input from stakeholders, and new modeling that examines the impact of emerging health care delivery trends on physician shortages.

Key findings from the report include:

- **The projected shortage of between 46,900 and 121,900 physicians by 2032 includes** both primary care (between 21,100 and 55,200) and specialty care (between 24,800 and 65,800). Among specialists, the data project a shortage of between 1,900 and 12,100 medical specialists, 14,300 and 23,400 surgical specialists, and 20,600 and 39,100 other specialists, such as pathologists, neurologists, radiologists, and psychiatrists, by 2032.
- **The major factor driving demand for physicians continues to be a growing, aging population.** According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the nation’s population is estimated to grow by more than 10% by 2032, with those over age 65 increasing by 48%. Additionally, the aging population will affect physician supply, since one-third of all currently active doctors will be older than 65 in the next decade. When these physicians decide to retire could have the greatest impact on supply.
- **The supply of physician assistants (PAs) and advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs) is projected to continue to increase.** The report models their role in providing health care. Further research is required on the types of services these professionals are providing, and if, or at what point, the supply of PAs and APRNs will become saturated.

- **Emerging health care delivery trends designed to improve overall population health do not have a significant effect on physician shortage projections.** The report's first-time analysis of emerging health care delivery trends, including providing better care coordination across settings, reducing unnecessary hospitalizations and emergency visits, increasing use of advanced practice providers, reducing obesity and tobacco use, and applying managed care models and risk sharing agreements such as Accountable Care Organizations, only reduced demand for physicians by 2032 by 1%. This analysis is presented as new work and will be refined further before being included in future overall shortage estimates.
- **The United States would need an additional 95,900 doctors immediately if health care use patterns were equalized across race, insurance coverage, and geographic location.** This shortage would be in addition to the number of providers necessary to meet demand in Health Professions Shortage Areas as designated by the Health Resources and Services Administration. This additional demand was not included in the production of the overall shortage ranges.
- **While rural and historically underserved areas may experience the shortages more acutely, the need for more physicians will be felt everywhere.** The overall supply of physicians will need to increase more than it is currently projected to in order to meet this demand.

[Read more key findings](#)[View the infographic](#)

To help address the physician shortage, the bipartisan Resident Physician Shortage Reduction Act of 2019 (S. 348, H.R. 1763) has been introduced in Congress to provide increased Medicare support for an additional 3,000 new residency positions each year over the next five years.

“The AAMC supports legislation to increase federal support for graduate medical education as part of a multifaceted strategy to ensure that Americans have access to the care they need when they need it,” Kirch said. “The data consistently show a significant physician shortage. Because it takes seven to 15 years to train a doctor, we urge Congress to remove the freeze on federal funding for residency training that has been in place for over two decades without delay.”

[Learn more about residency and the shortage](#)

The Association of American Medical Colleges is a not-for-profit association dedicated to transforming health care through innovative medical education, cutting-edge patient care, and groundbreaking medical research. Its members are all 154 accredited U.S. and 17 accredited Canadian medical schools; nearly 400 major teaching hospitals and health systems, including 51 Department of Veterans Affairs medical centers; and more than

80 academic societies. Through these institutions and organizations, the AAMC serves the leaders of America's medical schools and teaching hospitals and their more than 173,000 full-time faculty members, 89,000 medical students, 129,000 resident physicians, and more than 60,000 graduate students and postdoctoral researchers in the biomedical sciences.

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