

National Foundation for American Policy

November 19, 2025

Contact: Stuart Anderson, 703-351-5042, press@nfap.com

New Research: Foreign-Born Workers Make Key Contributions to U.S. Health Care

Immigrants Crucial for Biomedical Research, Nursing and Other Health Science Fields

Arlington, Va. – Foreign-born workers make a vital contribution to health care in the United States. The foreign born help meet U.S. health care needs not only by working as health care practitioners, technicians, and support workers, but also by conducting biomedical research, teaching students in health science-related fields and working in health care-related manufacturing, according to a new [analysis](#) from the National Foundation for American Policy (NFAP), a nonpartisan research organization based in Arlington, VA.

The study's author is Madeline Zavodny, a Professor of Economics at the University of North Florida (UNF) in Jacksonville. Zavodny was an economist in the research department of the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta and the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas.

The study "The Contributions of Foreign-Born Workers to U.S. Health Care," can be found at <https://nfap.com/>.

The foreign born are especially likely to be working as physicians and surgeons (over 26 percent of whom are foreign born) and dentists (22 percent foreign born). They are also especially likely to be working as home health aides (41 percent foreign born), personal care aides (28 percent), and nursing assistants (22 percent). Meanwhile, they are notably less likely to be working as physical therapists (9 percent foreign born) and as pharmacy technicians (15 percent).

The foreign born are also a large share of workers in the health care industry, not all of whom are in health care occupations. Echoing their disproportionate share of home health and personal care aides, the foreign born are most overrepresented in the home and other health care services sector. By increasing the supply of home health and personal care aides, immigrant inflows have enabled more elderly and disabled people to remain at home instead of having to move to an institution. Immigration also improves the quality of care within nursing homes and residential care facilities by increasing the availability of nursing assistants.

"Immigrants have always strengthened our nation—and nowhere is that clearer than in the health care field," said U.S. Senator Alex Padilla (D-CA) in a statement. "They drive innovation at the forefront of medical research, perform highly skilled procedures, and provide critical care for our elderly population. With rising costs and growing demand in health care, we need immigrant health care workers more than ever to help meet critical needs and deliver quality care."

Almost one-half of biomedical researchers are foreign born. Foreign-born biomedical researchers have higher levels of education, on average, than U.S.-born biomedical researchers, and they are more likely to hold patents and/or have publications. The foreign born account for about one-quarter of U.S. patents related to health care. Foreign-born workers also help train the next generation of health care workers and work in jobs manufacturing health care devices and pharmaceuticals.

"We must expand America's STEM workforce to compete in the global economy," said Rep. Bill Foster (D-IL). "Our country gives international STEM students a world-class education, only to turn them away when they want to stay in the United States after graduation and contribute their skills to our economy. Allowing these graduates to stay would help put our country on the cutting edge of scientific research and technological development and create good-paying American jobs along the way."

Foster and Rep. Mike Lawler (R-NY) introduced the [Keep STEM Talent Act](#). The bill enables individuals who earned a master's degree or higher in a STEM field from a U.S. university to not be subject to the numerical limits for employment-based immigration if they possess a job offer and received labor certification.

Almost one in five workers in a health care occupation are foreign born. Many foreign-born health care workers are in occupations that require years of highly specialized training: over one in four physicians and surgeons are foreign born; over one in five dentists; over one in six registered nurses; and almost one in five pharmacists. Other foreign-born health care workers are in occupations that require little formal training but are in high demand: over two in five home health aides are foreign born; over one in four personal care aides; and over one in five nursing assistants. The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that home health and personal care aides – the occupations with the highest shares of foreign-born workers – will experience the most job growth of all U.S. jobs over the next decade.

The study presents a comprehensive overview of foreign-born workers' contributions to health care in the United States using data from the Current Population Survey (CPS) and the National Survey of College Graduates (NSCG). The CPS is a large monthly survey conducted by the Bureau of the Census and the Bureau of Labor Statistics that asks households about their demographic characteristics and employment situation. The survey offers the most up-to-date picture of the U.S. labor force. This study also uses data from the NSCG, a biennial survey conducted by the National Science Foundation that asks U.S. residents who have at least a bachelor's degree a more detailed set of questions about their educational background and work activities than the CPS.

The aging of the U.S. population and the rising prevalence of chronic diseases increase the importance of ensuring that the country has an adequate supply of health care workers, while advances spurred by new research hold the promise of improving the quality of life for millions of Americans. Foreign-born workers are essential to both the supply of health care workers and research that leads to new pharmaceuticals and medical devices. Nonetheless, there are no visa categories reserved only for health care workers. Less than 7 percent of H-1B visas in fiscal year 2023 were awarded to workers in medicine and health care occupations. Foreign-born workers in health care occupations that do not require specialized training are not eligible for any temporary worker visa categories.

About the National Foundation for American Policy

Established in 2003, the National Foundation for American Policy (NFAP) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, nonpartisan public policy research organization based in Arlington, Virginia focusing on trade, immigration and related issues. The Advisory Board members include Columbia University economist Jagdish Bhagwati, Ohio University economist Richard Vedder, Cornell Law School professor Stephen W. Yale-Loehr and former INS Commissioner James W. Ziglar. Over the past 24 months, NFAP's research has been written about in the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and other major media outlets. The organization's reports can be found at www.nfap.com. X.com: [@NFAPResearch](#)

1550 Wilson Blvd., Suite 700, Arlington, VA 22209
phone: (703) 351-5042 fax: (703) 351-9292 www.nfap.com