

ISSUE SUMMARY

With the nation's population growing and becoming increasingly diverse, it is crucial that the physician workforce reflect the changing demographics of the country to mitigate racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic health disparities. The AAMC supports several public and private efforts, such as Title VII workforce training programs and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) status, that aid in diversifying the health care workforce to meet the health care needs of different communities.

Issue

Since the passage of the Affordable Care Act, millions of Americans are accessing health care for the first time. It is important that medical schools and teaching hospitals produce a racially and ethnically diverse and culturally responsive health care workforce to meet the health care needs of underserved populations, improve cultural awareness, and eliminate health disparities. Supporting the efforts of medical schools and teaching hospitals to improve the diversity of the physician workforce are fundamental to achieving better health for all.

Background

A diverse workforce is necessary for improving patient care and health outcomes, especially for the sizable U.S. minority population disproportionately affected by health disparities. The U.S. population is projected to become a majority-minority in 2044, thereby increasing the need to prepare and train health care professionals who are culturally responsive and equipped to provide quality care in a multicultural society. Diversity in the health professions leads to improvements in access to care for the underserved, better quality of care, and learning environments that increase creativity and innovation for all students. The composition of the current physician workforce indicates that only about 9 percent of physicians identify as black or African-American, American Indian or Alaska Native, and Hispanic or Latino, which is not representative of the nation's demographic shift. Minority scientists are also significantly underrepresented in the research workforce. For example, a 2012 report from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) indicates that only 1.1 percent of NIH principal investigators on research project grants in 2010 were black or African-American. Creating educational opportunities that help develop a physician and scientist workforce that is reflective of the needs of and responsive to the needs of diverse populations is critical to advancing health equity.

Studies have demonstrated how effective pipeline programs, such as the Health Careers Opportunity Program (HCOP) and the Summer Medical and Dental Education Program, are in strengthening students' academic records, improving test scores, and helping minority and disadvantaged students become more competitive applicants for health professions training programs. Title VII health professions programs, such as Centers of Excellence (COE) and HCOP, are critical federal investments in diversifying the health care workforce. HCOP is a K–16 pipeline program that partners with local educational and community organizations to improve the recruitment and retention of minority and disadvantaged students in the health professions workforce. The AAMC report, *Altering the Course: Black Males in Medicine*, highlighted the decline of black males applying for medical school, which is why pipeline programs, such as HCOP, play a critical role in diversifying the physician workforce. COEs support increased research on minority health, establish educational pipelines, and provide clinical experiences in community-based health facilities.

In 2016, the Supreme Court closed an eight-year chapter of uncertainty by upholding the constitutionality of considering race in admissions under *Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin*. The court's decision reaffirms the educational benefits of diversity and defers to the good-faith judgments of educators who strive to achieve those benefits for their students and for society as a whole. The decision embraces the notion of diversity as multi-dimensional and bolsters the use of individualized, holistic review in admissions, based on each school's mission and circumstances. In light of this decision, U.S. medical schools may continue their institution-specific efforts both to ensure that graduating physicians are prepared to practice medicine in an increasingly diverse society and to address the disparities that exist in today's health care system.

According to an annual survey of all medical school deans, in 2015, 84 percent of respondents reported specific admissions programs or policies designed to recruit a diverse student body interested in caring for underserved populations—including programs and policies geared toward minorities underrepresented in medicine, students from disadvantaged backgrounds, and students from rural and underserved communities.

For certain undocumented immigrants, DACA grants lawful presence in the United States, work authorization, Social Security numbers, and, in many cases, state IDs and driver's licenses, all of which make application to medical school and residency training possible. Students with DACA status represent a diverse, multicultural, multiethnic population, who are often bilingual and likely to return to practice in medicine in underserved communities. In 2014, the AAMC expanded its Fee Assistance Program (FAP) for the Medical College Admission Test® (MCAT®) and the American Medical College Application Service® (AMCAS®) to students with DACA status. Despite the opening of these doors, DACA students frequently identify as economically disadvantaged and cite ineligibility for federal financial aid as one of the biggest barriers to attending medical school.

AAMC Policy Recommendations

- The federal government should continue supporting efforts to diversify the health care workforce by providing continued and adequate funding for the Title VII health professions programs, such as COEs, HCOP, and Scholarships for Disadvantaged Students.
- The AAMC supports the consideration of race in admissions under holistic review to help ensure a diverse workforce to address health disparities.
- The AAMC supports expanding eligibility of federal financial aid to students with DACA status.

Related Issues

- Physician Workforce Issues
- Health Equity

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Web Resources

AAMC's Resources and Inspiration for Aspiring Docs

<https://students-residents.aamc.org/choosing-medical-career/medical-careers/aspiring-docs>

Summer Health Professions Education Program

<http://shpep.org/>

AAMC's Diversity and Inclusion Resources

www.aamc.org/initiatives/diversity

AAMC's Discussion of Holistic Review

www.aamc.org/initiatives/holisticreview

AAMC Publication: *Altering the Course: Black Males in Medicine*

www.aamc.org/blackmalesinmed