Why physicians are vital part of the nation’s infrastructure

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What’s the news: The AMA and more than 50 other physician and health care organizations are urging congressional leaders to include federal support for resident physician training in their efforts to bolster the nation’s infrastructure.

The Graduate Medical Education (GME) Advocacy Coalition, of which the AMA is a part, sent a letter to the Republican and Democratic leaders of the House of Representatives noting that “physicians are a vital part of our health care infrastructure, and it is critical that we train more in order to meet the needs of our diverse and growing nation, ensure patient access to care, and prepare for the next public health crisis.”

Funding for 1,000 new Medicare-supported GME slots was included in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021. But more can and should be done, notes the GME Advocacy Coalition’s letter, which highlights the bipartisan Resident Physician Shortage Reduction Act of 2021 (S. 834/H.R. 2256) that would gradually provide 14,000 new Medicare-supported GME positions.

“These positions would be targeted to hospitals with diverse needs, including rural teaching hospitals, hospitals serving patients in health-professional shortage areas, hospitals in states with new medical schools or branch campuses, and hospitals already training over their Medicare caps,” says the coalition letter.

Why it’s important: The nation is facing a shortage of up to 139,000 physicians by 2033, and it’s a figure likely to be worsened by pandemic-related rates of early retirement and physician burnout. Nearly 45% of active physicians are 55 or older.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the critical need for additional federal investment in our health care infrastructure, and in particular the need for more physicians,” says the coalition’s letter.

Roughly 40% of all charity care in the U.S. is provided by teaching facilities where residents learn—that equates to $8.4 billion in care. Specifically, teaching hospitals deliver 20% of all hospital
care and provide for seniors, veterans, and patients in underserved communities. Residents also often stay and practice in the cities and towns where they are trained, which benefits local communities.

Learn more: The AMA’s SaveGME.org website explains in greater details how funding for GME helps ensure resident physicians learn to provide the care we need, when we need it.

The AMA Resident and Fellow Section gives voice to—and advocates for—issues that affect resident and fellow physicians.