Immigration Reform Will Help Ease Long Term Care Workforce Shortage

Long term care facilities across the nation are ready, willing, and able to offer tens of thousands of good-paying jobs that, if filled, will help boost the quality of care for frail, elderly, and disabled Americans. Unfortunately, our nation’s health care system has experienced a shortage of trained caregivers for these critical jobs for some time.

Immigrants play a critical role in providing care for the most vulnerable citizens. For example, according to PHI, the nation’s leading authority on the direct care workforce, one in four direct care workers is an immigrant. Further, the total number of immigrants in these positions continues to grow, with an estimated 65 percent increase over 10 years to 860,000 immigrant direct care workers in 2015.

A study by the Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) and the Department of Labor (DOL) estimates that the U.S. will need between 5.7 million and 6.5 million nurses, nurse aides, home health, and personal care workers to care for the 27 million Americans who will require long term care in 2050. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, these positions are among the fastest growing occupations in terms of projected growth in the number of available positions. The shortage of available employment-based visas for foreign trained nurses – primarily from India and the Philippines – contributes to the inability of nursing home providers to bring these nurses to fill those vacancies.

In fact, the current temporary and permanent visa programs are insufficient and inadequate to accommodate the needs of U.S. health care providers.

AHCA/NCAL believes that new immigration laws should serve the needs of the U.S. economy and that policy remedies, which can address immediate needs should be pursued. Specifically, AHCA/NCAL believes that, given the current nurse shortage nationwide, the federal government should consider allowing employers access to previously unused H-1B temporary worker visas. In terms of the broader policy issues around immigration, AHCA/NCAL would support the following approach: if a U.S. employer is offering a job that American citizens are not available to take, we should welcome into our country a person who will fill that job – especially a critical job that has the capacity to improve the health and well-being of America’s seniors and people with disabilities.

Key Facts

- According to HHS & DOL, 5.7 million – 6.5 million nurses, nurse aides, home health & personal care workers will be needed to care for the 27 million Americans who will require some type of long term care by 2050.
- Nurses and nurse aides are among the fastest growing occupations, but supply is not keeping pace.
- AHCA/NCAL participates alongside over 30 other member of EWIC—the Essential Worker Immigration Coalition, which is concerned about the shortage of lesser skilled & unskilled or “essential worker” labor. More at www.ewic.org