

# United States Senate

April 11, 2019

COMMITTEES

HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR, AND  
PENSIONS

COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND  
TRANSPORTATION

HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL  
AFFAIRS

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

SMALL BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro  
Comptroller General of the United States  
U.S. Government Accountability Office  
441 G Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

With 79 million people in our country living in primary care health provider shortage areas, the training of providers to meet our current and future health care needs is a critical issue. According to the Health Resources and Services Administration, nationwide 14,900 primary care providers are currently needed to fill this gap. Even more people lack access to a mental health provider, with 115 million people living in an area with a shortage of providers for this type of care. My home state of Nevada ranks 48th in the nation in terms of primary care physicians per capita, and recent reports estimate that even if the state's population remains stagnant, it would take over 2,500 more doctors just to bring Nevada up to the national average. With a rapidly aging population and more and more Americans moving to Nevada each year, this gap will only continue to widen over time.

As Congress evaluates options to improve access to both primary and specialty care and adequately support medical training programs in the most effective way, GAO has the unique ability to provide critical insight. I respectfully request that GAO write a report that answers the following questions.

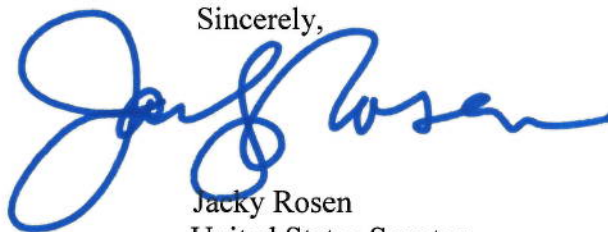
1. Given the shortage of medical providers to treat patients in various parts of our country, what are your recommendations for what steps could best solve this issue?
2. Please provide an analysis of how many and which hospitals are operating above the Medicare GME cap, with more residency slots than they receive GME funding for, and by how many slots. Please also provide how many GME slots are going unused and where those are located.
3. What tools could be used to maximize the reach of primary care physicians in treating patients to the best of their ability? What additional training programs are available to primary care physicians looking to gain additional experience and training of up to one year, but not to the extent of a full specialty?
4. How could existing workforce programs, including Medicare GME, be adjusted to meet our current and projected needs? Are there incentives that could be used to more effectively align our country's future medical needs, both by specialty and geography, including specifically addressing provider shortages in rural areas?

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5. For graduate medical education slots that go unfilled, is it feasible that unused slots could be reallocated and used by another institution in a different state within the same class year?
6. Under current law, new residency programs in underserved areas have a maximum of five years to establish their residency cap. What would be the impact of providing flexibility, such as providing additional time for new teaching hospitals to establish their cap? How could that change improve physician shortages in underserved or rural areas? How much time would be most effective if this flexibility were to be provided? Are there other factors that should be considered in the context of increasing the amount of time to establish a residency cap or change an existing cap?
7. The Health Resources and Services Administration 2016 report to Congress on the National Health Service Corps (NHSC) showed there were more applicants for the NHSC scholarship and loan repayment program than there were awards available. What are the current statistics on the number of applicants versus new awards? How many more new awards for scholarships and loan repayment programs would the country need to meet the growing needs of rural and underserved communities?

I appreciate your time and consideration of this request. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions, or have your staff contact Megan Thompson on my staff at [megan\\_thompson@rosen.senate.gov](mailto:megan_thompson@rosen.senate.gov).

Sincerely,



Jacky Rosen  
United States Senator