

March 20, 2023

The Honorable Bernie Sanders  
Chair, Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions  
332 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bill Cassidy, MD  
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions  
455 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

**Re: Request for Information on Drivers of Healthcare Workforce Shortages**

Dear Chairman Sanders and Ranking Member Cassidy:

On behalf of the American College of Medical Genetics and Genomics (ACMG)<sup>1</sup>, I want to thank you for your attention to the healthcare workforce shortages that challenge our medical system and create barriers for patients seeking healthcare. As leaders in the field of Medical Genetics, we want to specifically bring to your attention the workforce shortage of medical geneticists in the United States. Medical genetics is one of 24 medical specialties recognized by the American Board of Medical Specialties. The medical genetics specialty includes clinical geneticists (MD/DO or equivalent), PhD medical geneticists (PhD), and laboratory geneticists (MD/DO or PhD or equivalent), as well as the clinical subspecialty of medical biochemical genetics (MD/DO or equivalent). The specialty also includes allied healthcare professionals, primarily genetic counselors, who work as part of the medical team.

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<sup>1</sup> Founded in 1991, the American College of Medical Genetics and Genomics (ACMG) is a prominent authority in the field of medical genetics and genomics and the only nationally recognized medical professional organization solely dedicated to improving health through the practice of medical genetics and genomics. As the only medical specialty society in the US that represents the full spectrum of medical genetics disciplines in a single organization, the ACMG provides education, resources and a voice for more than 2,500 clinical and laboratory geneticists, genetic counselors, and other healthcare professionals. ACMG's mission is to improve health through the clinical and laboratory practice of medical genetics as well as through advocacy, education, and clinical research, and to guide the safe and effective integration of genetics and genomics into all of medicine and healthcare, resulting in improved personal and public health.

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Clinical medical geneticists are physicians who diagnose and treat patients with rare diseases as well as more common genetic diseases such as familial hypercholesterolemia. They care for patients of all ages, from infants born with multiple birth defects to adults with Huntington disease. Clinical geneticists bridge the gap between basic science discoveries and better health outcomes for patients, incorporating new treatments including gene therapy to enable those with conditions that were once uniformly fatal to enjoy long, productive lives. The medical services they provide are at the core of precision medicine. But there are insufficient numbers of clinical geneticists to provide access to these diagnostic and therapeutic breakthroughs. Patients often have to wait up to a year to see a clinical medical geneticist and may have to travel hundreds of miles. A 2020 US Government Accountability Office (GAO) report<sup>2</sup> found that 12 states had fewer than one clinical medical geneticist per 500,000 people. Of the 12 states, one state—Wyoming—did not have any medical geneticist.

There are many reasons for the shortages including poor reimbursement for services and relatively low salaries compared to many other medical specialties. Medical students often graduate with hundred thousands of dollars in debt. In order to repay these loans, they enter specialties with much more lucrative salaries such as surgery. Although the majority of clinical medical geneticists care for children, this is not a pediatric subspecialty and therefore not included in the Pediatric Subspecialty Loan Repayment Program (PSLRP).

Another factor contributing to the clinical medical geneticist shortage is that there is an insufficient number of funded graduate medical education (GME) training slots for those who wish to pursue medical genetics training. While wealthier institutions are able to fund training programs with non-GME funds, many healthcare systems are not.

We propose that the following be considered to increase the numbers of clinical medical geneticists and ensure that all US citizens can access care:

- A loan repayment program, similar to the PSLRP, for those who train in clinical medical genetics to help relieve their student loan debt.

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<sup>2</sup> Genetic Services: Information on Genetic Counselor and Medical Geneticist Workforces. GAO-20-593. July 31, 2020. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-20-593.pdf>

- Increased funding for graduate medical education in categorical and combined training programs for clinical medical genetics.
- Incentives for clinical medical geneticists to practice in underserved areas.
- Improved payment and reimbursement for medical genetics services as established by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS).

The ACMG appreciates the opportunity to provide this feedback and looks forward to discussing the topic with you further, including additional details and suggestions on the points listed. For additional information or to discuss these issues in more detail, please contact Dr. Michelle McClure, ACMG's Public Policy Director, at [mmclure@acmg.net](mailto:mmclure@acmg.net).

Sincerely,



Susan Klugman, MD, FACMG  
President  
American College of Medical Genetics and Genomics

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