



Ensuring an Adequate Surgical Workforce in Underserved Areas

House: Cosponsor H.R. 1841, the *Ensuring Access to General Surgery Act*.

Senate: Urge reintroduction of the *Ensuring Access to General Surgery Act*.

Increasing evidence indicates a current and growing shortage of surgeons available to serve our nation's population. A shortage of general surgeons is a critical component of the crisis in health care workforce because only surgeons are uniquely trained and qualified to provide certain necessary, lifesaving procedures. In light of growing evidence demonstrating a shortage of general surgeons, the American College of Surgeons (ACS) believes more accurate and actionable workforce data is necessary to determine exactly what constitutes a surgical shortage area and subsequently where these areas exist.

Shortage of General Surgeons

Unlike other key providers of the community based health care system, general surgeons do not currently have a formal workforce shortage area designation. By the Health Resources and Services Administration's (HRSA) own estimates in a 2016 analysis, the supply of general surgeons will not keep up with population growth, falling behind nearly 3,000 general surgeons by 2025. However, in their analysis, HRSA recognizes that there is no consistent national or regional data source available to estimate baseline shortages or surpluses, and that lack of data forces them to use the 2013 supply of general surgeons as a baseline for demand. The lack of consistent, unbiased data on supply and demand further emphasizes the need for more accurate data.

Legislative Efforts

The ACS strongly supports the *Ensuring Access to General Surgery Act* (H.R. 1841), sponsored by Representatives Ami Beri, MD (D-CA), Larry Bucshon, MD, FACS (R-IN), Scott Peters (D-CA), and Markwayne Mullin (R-OK). This legislation would direct the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), through the HRSA, to conduct a study to define a general surgery workforce shortage area and collect data on the adequacy of access to surgical services. Additionally, it would grant the Secretary the authority to provide a general surgery shortage area designation.

Identifying where patients lack access to surgical services will provide HRSA with a valuable new tool for increasing access to the full spectrum of high quality health care services. Determining what constitutes and defines a surgical shortage area is an important first step in guaranteeing all Medicare beneficiaries, regardless of geographic location, have access to quality surgical care.

Congressional Action

Cosponsor H.R. 1841, the *Ensuring Access to General Surgery Act*, in the House and work towards reintroduction of the legislation in the Senate.ⁱ

ⁱ Current to April 2, 2019. Please contact ahp@facs.org for an updated version.

