



The Laboratory Personnel Shortage

Support the Allied Health Reinvestment Act and Reauthorization/Increased Funding for Title VII

Congressional Action Requested

- Reauthorize the Title VII Allied Health Programs, including new provisions to help train laboratory professionals;
- Restore funding of Title VII programs to their FY 2005 levels of \$300 million;
- And Cosponsor the Allied Health Reinvestment Act (Sen. Cantwell), S. 605.

What's Title VII and AHRA Do?

The Title VII Allied Health Education Programs help provide funding for allied health education programs and students seeking careers in these professions. The Allied Health and Other Disciplines Program, one of the Title VII programs, helps provide funding for the establishment or expansion of programs such as those in the field of laboratory medicine.

Similarly, the Allied Health Reinvestment Act (AHRA) provides incentives for individuals to pursue careers in laboratory medicine and other allied health professions. The legislation does this via programs to support students interested in allied health careers and the academic institutions that train them. The legislation also assists with faculty development and provides for public service announcements to increase interest in allied health careers.

Why is Federal Support of the Laboratory Workforce Needed?

Patient access to quality health care services relies, in part, on an adequate supply of well-trained allied health professionals. Unfortunately, many allied health fields, including the field of medical laboratory science, are plagued by severe workforce shortages. The U.S. Department of Labor projects that approximately 15,000 medical laboratory professionals will be needed each year through 2014. Unfortunately, the programs preparing tomorrow's laboratory workforce train only about a third of what is needed. Fewer than 5,000 individuals are graduating each year from accredited training programs.

Personnel shortages raise concern about laboratory staff workload and turnover. Today, increasing numbers of laboratory professionals are working second jobs or extra shifts. Personnel turnover is also an increasing problem. With competition for qualified laboratory personnel intensifying, annual turnover rates for some categories of laboratory personnel exceed 20 percent. Because of the difficulty in finding qualified staff, medical laboratories are increasingly turning to temporary staff (many of whom may already be working full- or part-time clinical laboratory jobs) to handle the patient testing workload.

Another concern is the aging laboratory work force, reflecting the fact that the pace at which younger, newly trained laboratory professionals are entering the laboratory workforce is not keeping pace with retirements. Approximately 40 percent of the laboratory workforce is within ten years of retirement.

To make matters worse, our nation's capacity to train new laboratory professionals has declined substantially over the past ten years. According to the National Accrediting Agency for Clinical Laboratory Sciences, the number of accredited medical technology programs dropped from 709 in 1975 to 222 in 2007. For cytotechnologists, the number of training programs has been reduced 40 percent; from 65 programs in 1994 to 39 active programs in 2008.

What Impact Do Allied Health Professionals Have on Patient Care?

The contributions allied health professionals make to patient care can not be overstated. Laboratory professionals play a critical role in patient care. Laboratory testing performed by skilled laboratory practitioners is the foundation for most medical diagnoses and treatments. Thus, ensuring patients have access to the qualified laboratory professionals needed to provide prompt, quality testing services is imperative to quality care.

Can Title VII and the AHRA Make a Difference?

Yes. The Title VII and AHRA programs can help stabilize the closure of clinical education and training programs and help attract new students to careers in laboratory medicine. AHRA, with its student support and public service announcements, can help increase interest in the laboratory medicine profession. The Title VII Allied Health Programs can help prevent the closure of clinical education programs. For example, the allied health and other disciplines program has provided grants for several institutions to develop innovative programs, including those serving clinical laboratory professionals, that serve not just patients in states where these programs are located but also patients in other states as well. The University of Nebraska, for example, was a recipient of several of these grants.

According to data from the Health Research and Services Administration, Nebraska has more than 128 laboratory professionals per 100,000 residents—almost twice the number of Wyoming(which has no accredited training programs) and one of the highest concentrations of laboratory personnel per capita in the United States. Unfortunately, due to cuts in funding for the allied health and other disciplines grants program, funding for the University of Nebraska program and others supporting clinical laboratory science has been eliminated.

Given that laboratory and other allied health jobs have been ranked among the best jobs by the *Jobs Rated Almanac*, we believe that establishing programs to promote interest in these careers and stabilize the academic programs that train them will help address personnel shortages. This will improve our ability to meet the health care needs of our nation's patient population while simultaneously providing rewarding career opportunities.

We urge your support of allied health education to make these shared goals a reality.