



STATE OF WASHINGTON  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
HEALTH SYSTEMS QUALITY ASSURANCE  
*PO Box 47850, Olympia, WA 98504-7850*

Date: July 20, 2023

Dear Tribal Leader:

I am writing today to provide information about the Department of Health's consideration of a rule project to amend [Chapter 246-562 WAC](#) regarding physician visa waivers.

The Department of Health (department) is considering amending rules regarding J-1 physician visa waivers and establishing a fee for J-1 visa waiver applications. The department is considering these rule changes to help meet the greatest physician staffing needs across Washington State. The department is also considering amending rules concerning requirements pertaining to letters of support for applicants and establishing an application fee for J-1 visa waivers.

Rules in [Chapter 246-562 WAC](#) were last revised in 2016. Changes in physician practice and the need for physicians in rural areas need to be clarified in rule. The program has become increasingly competitive, and the department would like to consider changing the process for receiving and reviewing applications to meet the areas of greatest need. Lastly, the department is considering establishing an application fee to cover the costs of administration of the program.

For additional information and to provide written feedback, contact Kelly Shaw, Rural Health Workforce Director, at [J1VisaWaiver@doh.wa.gov](mailto:J1VisaWaiver@doh.wa.gov).

For tribal relations issues, please contact the department's Tribal Relations Director at [DOHTribalRelations@doh.wa.gov](mailto:DOHTribalRelations@doh.wa.gov).

Sincerely,

Kelly Shaw, MPH, Rural Health Workforce Director  
Health Systems Quality Assurance

cc: Umair A. Shah, Secretary, Department of Health  
Jessica Todorovich, Chief of Staff, Department of Health  
Kristopher Holiday, Chief, Office of Strategic Partnerships, Department of Health  
Lacy Fehrenbach, Chief, Office of Prevention, Safety and Health, Department of Health  
Kristin Peterson, Chief, Office of Policy, Planning and Evaluation, Department of Health  
Candice Wilson – Quatz'tenaut (Lummi), Tribal Policy Director, Department of Health  
Sasha De Leon, Assistant Secretary, Health Systems Quality Assurance, Department of Health  
Ian Corbridge, Director, Office of Community Health Systems, Department of Health  
Pat Justis, Executive Director, Rural Health, Department of Health



WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

## Rural Health WORKFORCE

WASHINGTON STATE  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,  
RURAL HEALTH

# J-1 VISA WAIVER PROGRAM



## BACKGROUND

Federal law requires that international physicians pursuing graduate education or training in the United States must obtain a J-1 Exchange Visitor Visa. Once they have completed their studies, physicians must return to their home country for at least two years before they can return to the United States.

The J-1 Visa Waiver Program eliminates the two-year home residency requirement and allows physicians to stay in the United States and practice in a Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA).

## OVERVIEW

The goal of the program is to increase the number of physicians available to work in rural and underserved areas of the state. The program is considered a secondary tool in recruitment, used when efforts to recruit a U.S. trained physician have been unsuccessful for an extended period.

The Washington State Department of Health can sponsor up to 30 waivers per federal fiscal year (October 1 through September 30).

- Waivers are available for primary care physicians and specialists.
- Practice location must be in a Health Professional Shortage Area (a limited number of Non-HPSA waivers are available)
- Primary care physicians are encouraged to use the [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services J-1 Visa Waiver Program for Clinical Care](#).

## CONTACT

### J-1 VISA WAIVER PROGRAM

J1VISAWAIVER@DOH.WA.GOV

[HTTPS://DOH.WA.GOV/PUBLIC-HEALTH-PROVIDER-RESOURCES/RURAL-HEALTH/WORKFORCE-RECRUITMENT-AND-RETENTION](https://doh.wa.gov/public-health-provider-resources/rural-health/workforce-recruitment-and-retention)

To request this document in another format, call 1-800-525-0127. Deaf or hard of hearing customers, please call 711 (Washington Relay) or email [civil.rights@doh.wa.gov](mailto:civil.rights@doh.wa.gov).

