

# PHYSICIANS FOR POLICY ACTION

October 18, 2017

To the members of the U.S. Congress:

We are a health advocacy group of academic physicians and other health professionals, based at Harvard Medical School. We are writing to express our concern about the adverse health effects that will result from the President's recent decision to rescind the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program and to encourage Congress to take legislative action to ensure that the young people eligible for DACA be allowed to live, work and study in this country without fear of deportation.

Our first concern is that rescinding DACA will adversely affect the health care work force caring for vulnerable and underserved communities, particularly those in rural areas. Nationally, the U.S. is experiencing a critical shortage of primary care physicians, and the deficit will continue to rise in coming years. The DACA program is an important avenue for increasing the number of practicing physicians in the U.S. health system. In 2016, 108 students with DACA status applied to U.S. medical schools<sup>1</sup>. DACA students are more likely to be bilingual and to come from diverse cultural backgrounds; removing these individuals from our health care training system is likely to amplify the health care shortages in underserved areas, where individuals with DACA status are more likely to practice medicine.

We are also concerned about the effect that rescinding DACA will have on public health. Fear of deportation is a tremendous barrier to health care for immigrants. As physicians, we have seen many personal cases of ill individuals who have delayed or avoided treatment because of this fear. This underutilization not only puts an individual's health at risk, but also represents a concern for public health. Tuberculosis, untreated HIV/AIDS, low immunization rates and untreated mental health issues pose a risk to everyone in the community.

Lastly, as physicians charged with caring for physical and mental health, we also consider the rescinding of the DACA program to be unnecessarily heartless. The health care communities that we represent include medical students, residents and fellows with DACA status. These individuals have completed lengthy and rigorous education programs, but they are now facing uncertainty about completing their degrees, paying their student loans, and caring for patients. Revoking the immigration status of these young people is a disservice to our communities and to our nation.

We urge Congress to support DACA recipients by quickly passing a legislative solution and allowing these young people to put their skills to their highest use, rather than living in the shadows.

Physicians for Policy Action

[www.physiciansforpolicyaction.org](http://www.physiciansforpolicyaction.org)

<sup>1</sup> AMA Press Release, September 5 2017: "AMA Urges Congress to Take Action to Retain DACA Program Protections"