



WYOMING CONRAD 30 J-1 VISA WAIVER PROGRAM 2008-2019



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Wyoming
Department
of Health

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INTRODUCTION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report describes the findings of a descriptive analysis of the Wyoming Conrad 30 J-1 Visa Waiver Program from 2008-2019. Demographic information, geographic distribution of placements, placement institution type, physician specialty, type and number of waivers, and retention data is described for the 79 physicians granted waivers in this time period. On average, Wyoming sponsors 6.58 out of a possible 30 waivers per year. Although not without challenges, the current level of utilization leaves room for growth of the program and lends itself to future opportunities.

PURPOSE

This report describes Wyoming's Conrad 30 J-1 Visa Waiver Program from fiscal year 2008 to June 1, 2019. The report tells the story of the program, identifies previous successes and challenges, and recommends future steps toward enhancing the program. These recommendations are made through an analysis of the demographics and job site characteristics of previous J-1 Waiver recipients as well as information on the retention of these physicians past their obligation. As Wyoming works to increase the number of waivers it sponsors per year, describing the past is the first critical step toward moving into the future.

J-1 VISA AND THE CONRAD 30 WAIVER PROGRAM

The Exchange Visitor Program, also known as the J-1 Visa Program, allows individuals from other countries to work or study in the United States. The program hosts over 300,000 participants each year to learn about American culture, share about their own culture, and acquire the skills needed for future careers¹. In 2018, 2,738 of those exchange visitors were considered International Medical Graduates or IMGs. IMGs are physicians who have graduated from medical school in a foreign country, and participate in further medical education or training, such as a residency or fellowship, in the United States². When their training is complete, along with other J-1 Visa holders, IMGs are subject to a two year home residency requirement.

Those utilizing the Exchange Visitor Program must not have the intention of becoming a permanent U.S. resident, therefore, IMGs are required to return to their country of last residency for at least two years when their program is finished.

The Conrad 30 Program, also known as the J-1 Visa Waiver Program, was established in 1994 to address physician shortages. The program allows states to provide IMG physicians on J-1 Visas with waivers that remove the two year home residency requirement in exchange for three years of practice in a federally designated Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA) or Medically Underserved Area/Population (MUA/P). Conrad 30 Waiver Programs are fully funded by individual states and do not receive any federal funding. At the advent of the program, just 20 waivers were granted to each state every year, but in 2002, the number was expanded to 30. In 2004, FLEX waivers were introduced into the J-1 Visa Waiver Program, which allowed states to grant five of their 30 waivers to physicians who would not work in a facility located inside a shortage area, but would serve patients residing in nearby shortage areas. This number was increased from five to 10 in 2008. IMGs are then on an H-1B Visa which would allow them to pursue permanent residency after three years of service.

J-1 VISA WAIVERS IN WYOMING

Wyoming's Conrad 30 J-1 Visa Waiver Program is part of a national effort by state departments of health, placing over 15,000 physicians in the United States over the past 17 years, to provide patient care to underserved communities. Every county in Wyoming has at least one HPSA, with most shortages occurring in primary care and mental health. There are 187,903 Wyomingites that currently live in a primary care HPSA. This means that only 53.8% of Wyoming has adequate access to a primary care provider.

Wyoming's Conrad 30 J-1 Visa Waiver Program is one of the programs working to alleviate these shortages. IMGs, including J-1 Visa Waiver recipients are important to serving the medical needs of Wyoming. As of 2016, they make up 13.1% of the physicians in Wyoming⁴. However, there are 30 available waivers each year to bring more physicians to Wyoming, but only seven are utilized per year on average. This report will inform future efforts to increase utilization of the J-1 Visa Waiver Program in Wyoming.

HOW TO GET STARTED

FEDERAL REQUIREMENTS FOR J-1 VISA WAIVERS

1. The physician must demonstrate a bonafide offer of employment at a health facility and must agree to work 40 hours per week for at least three years in a geographic area designated by the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services as having a shortage of healthcare professionals (regular), or will serve patients who reside in such underserved areas (FLEX), and in a facility which accepts Medicare/Medicaid as well as medically indigent patients.
2. The physician must agree to begin employment with the health facility or healthcare organization within 90 days of receiving such waiver.
3. If a “No Objection Statement” is required of the physician, the physician must provide a copy of the “No Objection Statement” from the government of the physician’s home country.
4. Physician must complete a DS-3035 application⁵.

WYOMING APPLICATION PROCEDURE

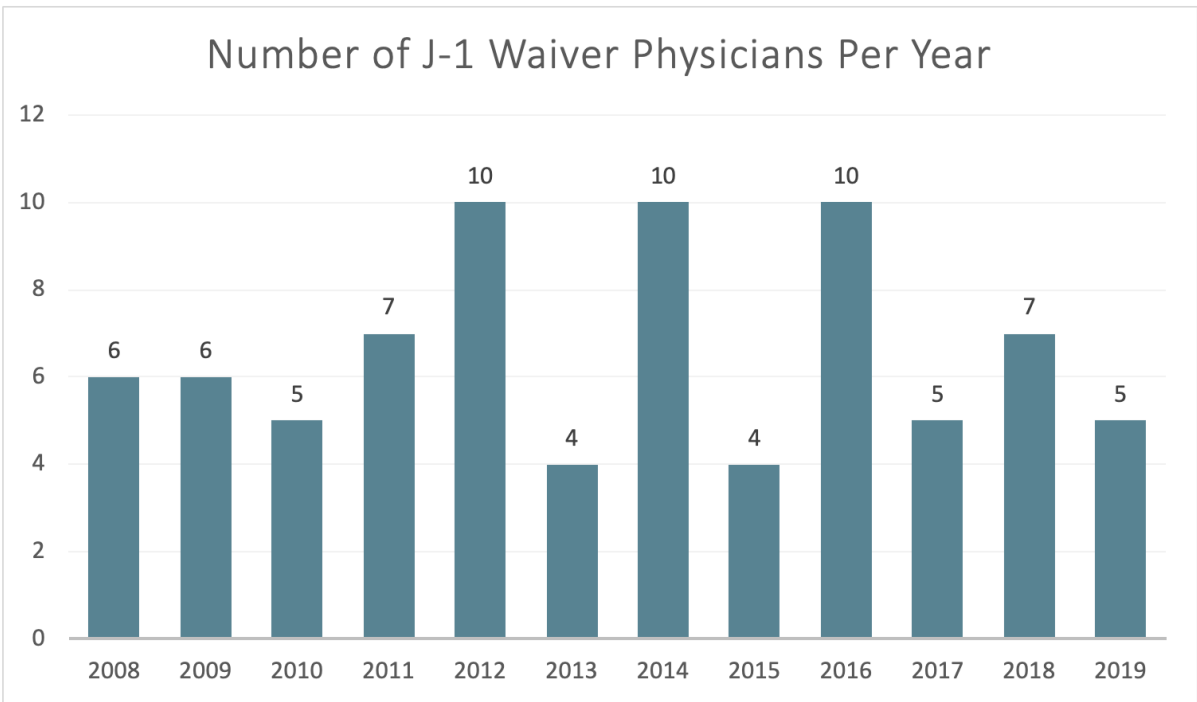
Wyoming does not have any requirements beyond the federal requirements listed above. For more information and required documentation for the Wyoming J-1 Visa Waiver Program, please visit

<https://health.wyo.gov/publichealth/rural/officeofruralhealth/primary-care-office/>

J-1 VISA WAIVER RECIPIENTS

NUMBER OF RECIPIENTS PER YEAR

Wyoming awarded 79 J-1 Waivers between October 2007 and July 2019. On average, Wyoming only utilizes 6.58 waivers per year out of the available 30 waivers per year, or 21.9%. Wyoming's small rural communities could increase access to quality healthcare and reduce provider shortages significantly by utilizing the remaining 78.1% of available waivers each year.



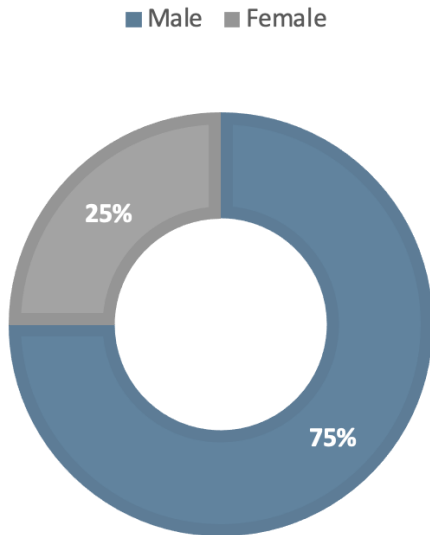
DEMOGRAPHICS

Age

Most of the physicians fall into the 30-39 age range (56 out of 79 physicians, or almost 71%). The second largest age group is 25-29 with 16.4% of physicians falling into this category.

Age of Wyoming J-1 Visa Waiver Physicians		
Age Group	Number of J-1 Visa Waiver Recipients	Percentage of Total
25-29	13	16.4%
30-39	56	70.9%
40-49	5	11.4%
50-59	1	1.3%

GENDER OF J-1 VISA WAIVER RECIPIENTS



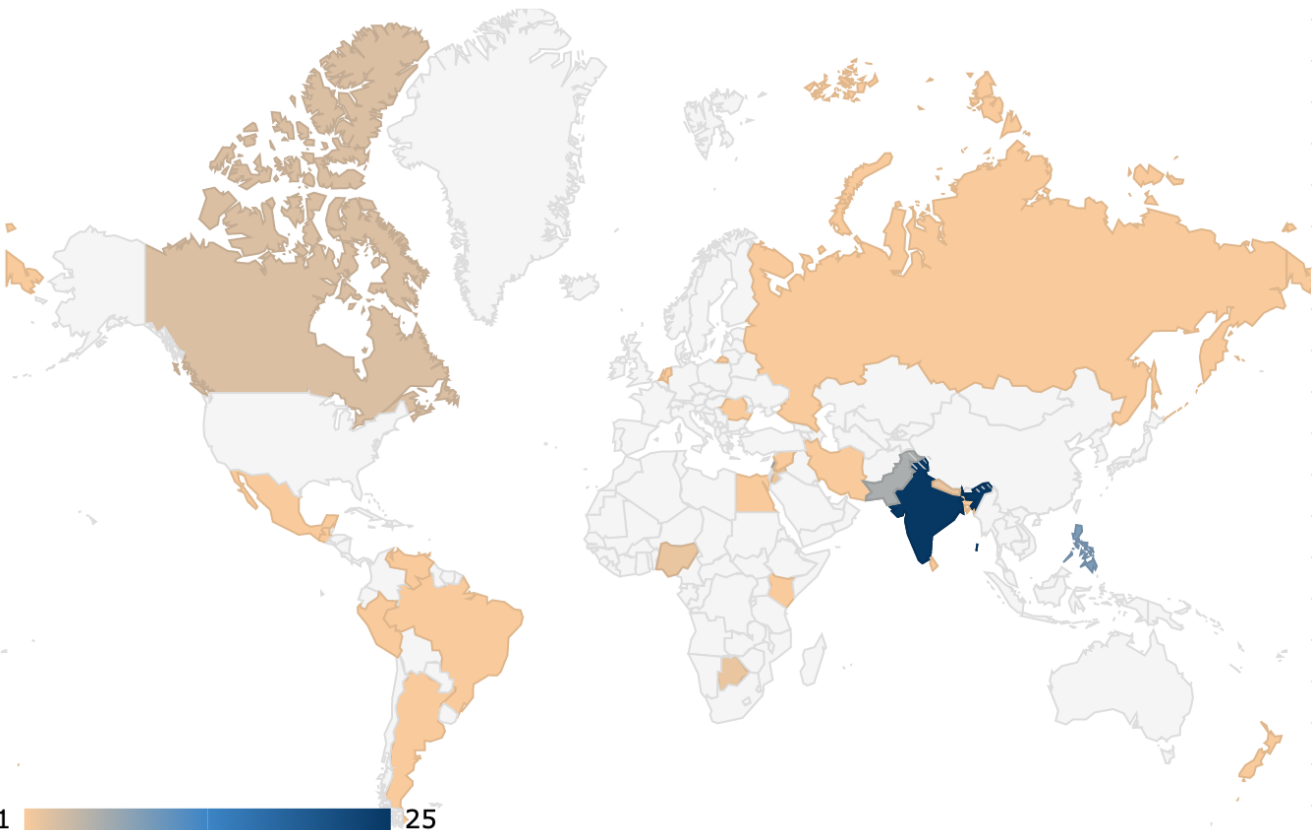
Gender

In Wyoming, 25% of waiver recipients are female physicians, while 75% are male physicians.

Country of Origin

Over the span of the program, J-1 Waiver Physicians practicing in Wyoming have come from 31 countries and five continents. The country of origin with the largest number of physician waivers is India with 25 (31.7%) and the second largest is the Philippines with 9 (11.4%).

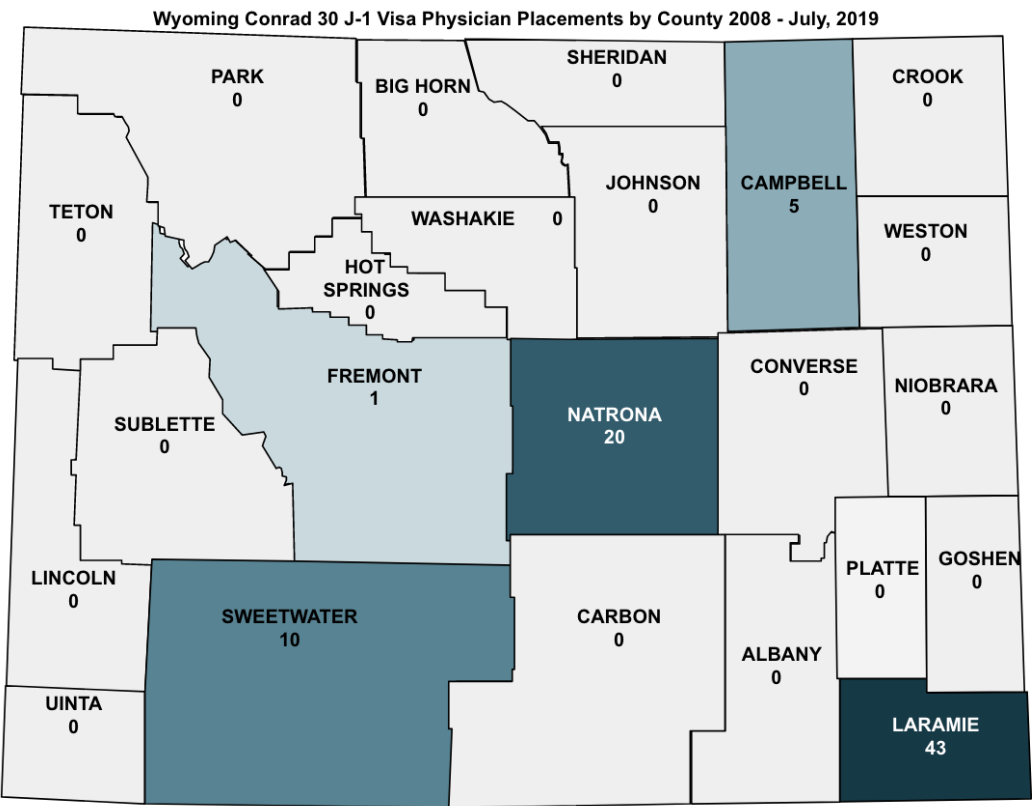
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN OF J-1 VISA WAIVER RECIPIENTS



GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF PHYSICIANS

County

J-1 physicians have been utilized in five out of Wyoming’s 23 counties. Most J-1 physicians began their work in Laramie county (55%), with Natrona county being second for J-1 physicians (25%).



Rural vs Urban

Urban areas are considered by the Census Bureau to have a population of 50,000 or more people, while rural and frontier areas are defined as anywhere that is not urban. About 20% of J-1 waiver physicians began their practice in a rural area, and 80% began in an urban area.

J-1 Physicians Practicing in an Urban vs Rural Area 2008-2019		
Area	Number	Percent
Rural	16	20.3%
Urban	63	79.7%

HPSA and MUA/P

Many physicians in Wyoming do not practice directly in a HPSA or MUA/P, but are serving patients who do live in a shortage area. From 2008-2019, almost 14% of J-1 physicians have practiced in a HPSA and 29% have practiced in a MUA/P.

J-1 Physicians Practicing in a HPSA 2008-2019		
Designation	Number	Percent
HPSA	11	13.9%
Non-HPSA	68	86.1%

J-1 Physicians Practicing in an MUA/P 2008-2019		
Designation	Number	Percent
MUA/P	23	29.1%
Non-MUA/P	56	70.9%

INSTITUTION TYPE

A majority of the J-1 physicians that practice in Wyoming spend their three years at a hospital or hospital affiliated institution (91%), while a few worked in private practice or other institutions (9%).

SPECIALTY

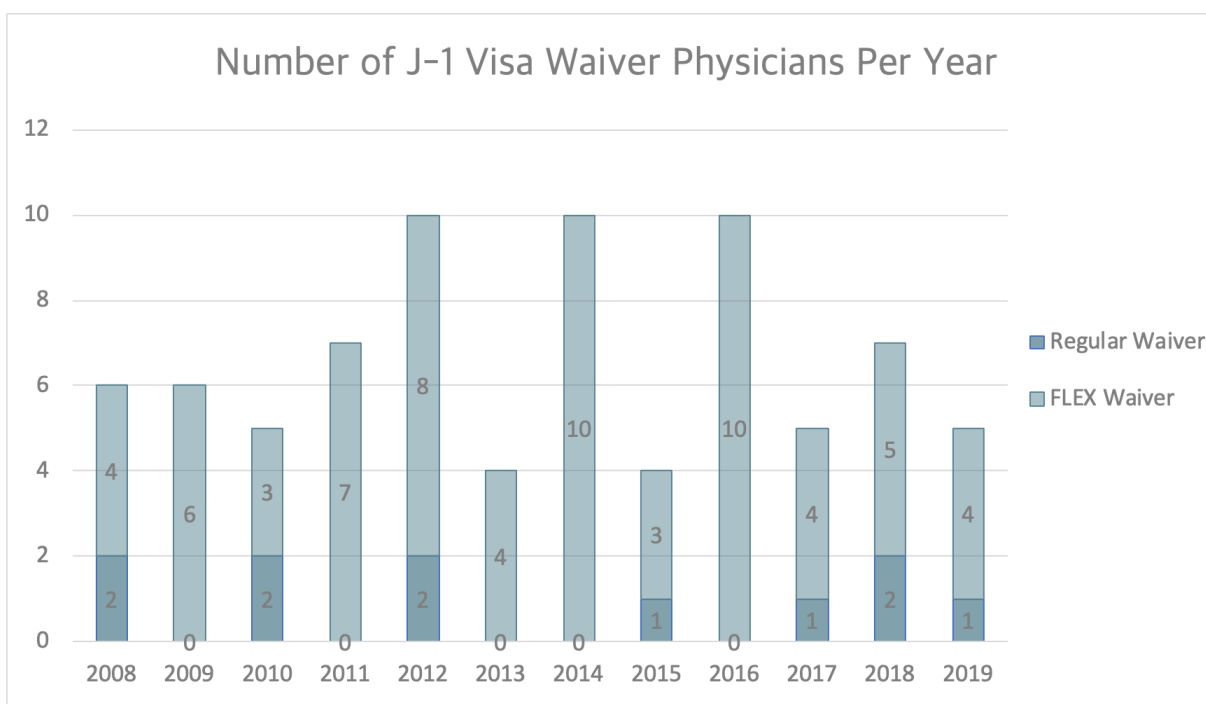
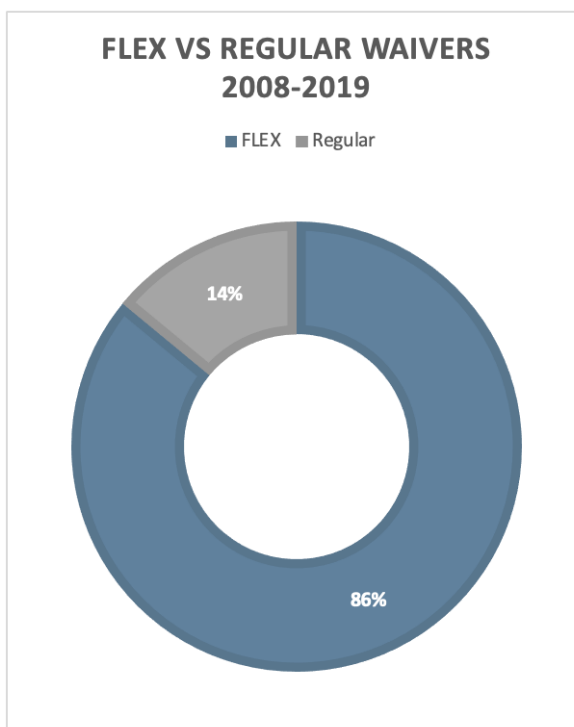
J-1 Physicians in Wyoming have a variety of specialties with most being hired on as hospitalists, which are usually family practitioners and doctors of internal medicine working exclusively in a hospital so other physicians can see patients in primary care. Below is a breakdown of the number of physicians in each specialty.

Specialties of Wyoming J-1 Visa Waiver Recipients 2008-2019		
Specialty	Number of Waiver Recipients	Percent of Total
Hospitalist	27	34.18%
Cardiology	7	8.86%
Neurology	5	6.33%
Pulmonary/Critical Care	5	6.33%
Endocrinology	4	5.06%
Internal Medicine	4	5.06%
Oncology/Hematology	4	5.06%
Pediatrics	4	5.06%
Interventional Cardiology	3	3.80%
General Surgery	2	2.53%
Nephrology	2	2.53%
OB/GYN	2	2.53%
Pathology	2	2.53%
Psychiatry	2	2.53%
Emergency Medicine	1	1.27%
Family Medicine	1	1.27%
Infectious Disease	1	1.27%
Occupational Medicine	1	1.27%
Rheumatology	1	1.27%
Vascular Surgery	1	1.27%
Total	79	100%

FLEX WAIVERS

FLEX Waivers allow states to sponsor up to 10 J-1 waiver physicians to work in institutions that are not necessarily in an underserved area, but serve patients who do live in a HPSA or MUA/P. Wyoming relies heavily on this opportunity to staff hospitals and hospital physician groups in Wyoming's two largest communities. Both of these urban hospitals and their respective physician groups treat patients from all over the state who cannot receive the same level of care or specialty care in their small rural communities. Some of these small communities lack a hospital and others may not have the population to support specialist physicians or more in-depth hospital care.

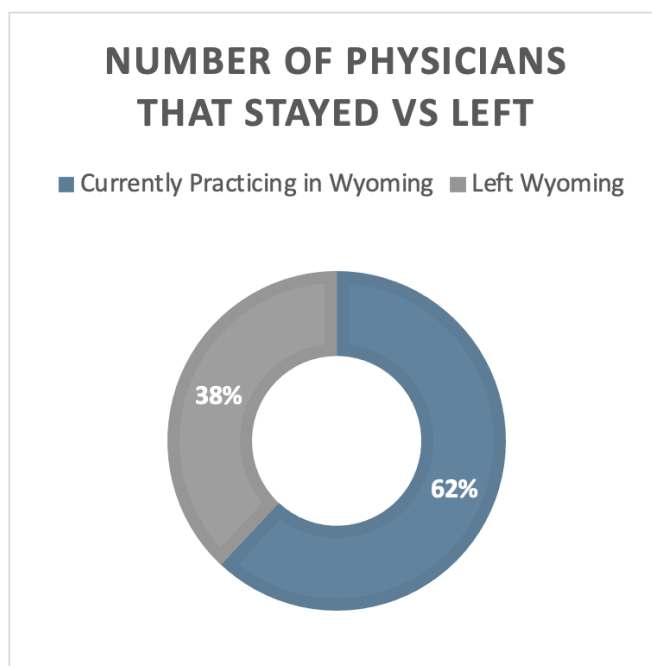
On average, Wyoming awards 5.7 FLEX waivers per year, with 86% of all waivers awarded being FLEX waivers.



RETENTION

STAYED IN WYOMING VS LEFT WYOMING

The J-1 Waiver Program is an extremely successful recruitment and retention tool for Wyoming. Many of the physicians who began work as a J-1 Waiver recipient in Wyoming have stayed long past their obligatory three years and have made a home in Wyoming communities. This is evidenced by the majority (62%) of J-1 Waiver physicians from 2008 or later currently practicing in Wyoming.



POST OBLIGATION YEARS

Physicians must remain at their original job site for at least three years, but are permitted to continue their job or stay in Wyoming post-obligation. Of the J-1 waiver physicians who stayed past their obligation:

- Those who stayed less than five years post obligation contributed a total of **43 post obligation years**, with an average of 2.26 years per physician.
- Those who stayed between five and 10 years post obligation contributed a total of **69 post obligation years**, with an average of 5.31 years per physician.
- Those who stayed 10+ years post obligation contributed a total of **53 post obligation years**, with an average of 10.6 years per physician.

MOVEMENT WITHIN WYOMING

Of the 49 J-1 physicians who have remained in Wyoming past their obligatory three years, 96% have remained in the community they originally began practice in under the J-1 Waiver Program. Only two (4%) have moved to another location within Wyoming solidifying the J-1 Waiver Program as a successful physician recruitment and retention tool for Wyoming.

PROGRAM OUTLOOK: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

CHALLENGES

Recruiting J-1 Waiver Physicians to Wyoming is challenging, and a variety of barriers (described below), may be negatively impacting the utilization of the Conrad 30 waiver:

- The waiver process must be initiated by the healthcare site that will act as the job site for the physician receiving the waiver. Rural healthcare sites face limited administrative capacity and may feel overwhelmed by navigating the waiver application system.
- Healthcare facilities are responsible for the legal fees associated with recruiting a J-1 Waiver Physician. While this cost may not be substantial for a medium to large healthcare facility, they may pose a burden for smaller facilities, who may choose to forgo sponsoring a J-1 Visa Waiver physician due to cost.
- Physicians recruited via the J-1 visa waiver program are foreign-trained, and in small, rural communities, there is sometimes a lack of understanding (by both patients and local healthcare facilities) surrounding the qualifications of these physicians.

OPPORTUNITIES

The Wyoming J-1 Visa Waiver Program has significant potential for growth. Healthcare facilities in the majority of Wyoming's medically-underserved communities have yet to sponsor a J-1 Visa Waiver physician even though those communities suffer from a shortage of physicians. As a result, Wyoming has not been able to utilize all 30 available waivers in any of the past 12 years and has lost the opportunity to recruit and retain up to 281 additional physicians. As a means to decrease physician shortages across the state, the Wyoming J-1 Visa Waiver Program seeks to increase the number of J-1 Visa Waiver physicians recruited into the state each year by promoting sponsorship of J-1 Waiver physicians in counties yet to take advantage of this unique opportunity to increase access to quality healthcare.

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