

POLICY SOLUTIONS FOR THE PANDEMIC

POLICY MEMO: MEDICAL LICENSE
RECIPROCITY SHOULD BE PERMANENT
MAY 18, 2020

The Buckeye Institute's Recommendation

When the COVID-19 crisis passes, Ohio should make permanent policies that recognize the out-of-state medical licenses of doctors, physician assistants, nurses, pharmacists, and other medical professionals, because removing employment barriers will benefit patients and frontline health care providers.

Background

In March, Governor DeWine responded quickly to the COVID-19 outbreak with an **executive order** declaring a state of emergency and directing state agencies to implement temporary rules “designed to prevent or alleviate this public health threat.” The **State Medical Board of Ohio**, the **Ohio Board of Nursing**, and the **State of Ohio Board of Pharmacy** then issued rules allowing out-of-state doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and physician assistants to practice during this emergency. The new rules—commonly called **license reciprocity**—have increased capacity and flexibility for patients, hospitals, and medical workers.

This overdue change helped Ohio cope with a health crisis that threatened to overwhelm its health care system. But even before the crisis, economists **agreed** that removing interstate employment barriers increases employment opportunities and lowers prices. A 2018 **report** by the U.S. departments of Health and Human Services, Treasury, and Labor concluded that there is “little” economic justification for these additional licensing requirements and that the “harm to consumers [in this case, patients] likely outweighs any benefits.”

Even after the current crisis wanes, Ohio should continue recognizing out-of-state licenses for medical professionals in order to increase health care access and provider mobility, and to make better use of **telehealth** technology. Rebuilding the licensing and employment barriers of Ohio's pre-crisis regime would be a mistake borne by patients, hospitals, and care providers.

Conclusion

Policymakers responded effectively to this crisis by lifting out-of-state medical licensing restrictions and implementing temporary licensing reciprocity rules. Ohio should make those new rules permanent so that the state's health care system can attract more highly trained care providers and reduce health care costs for patients.