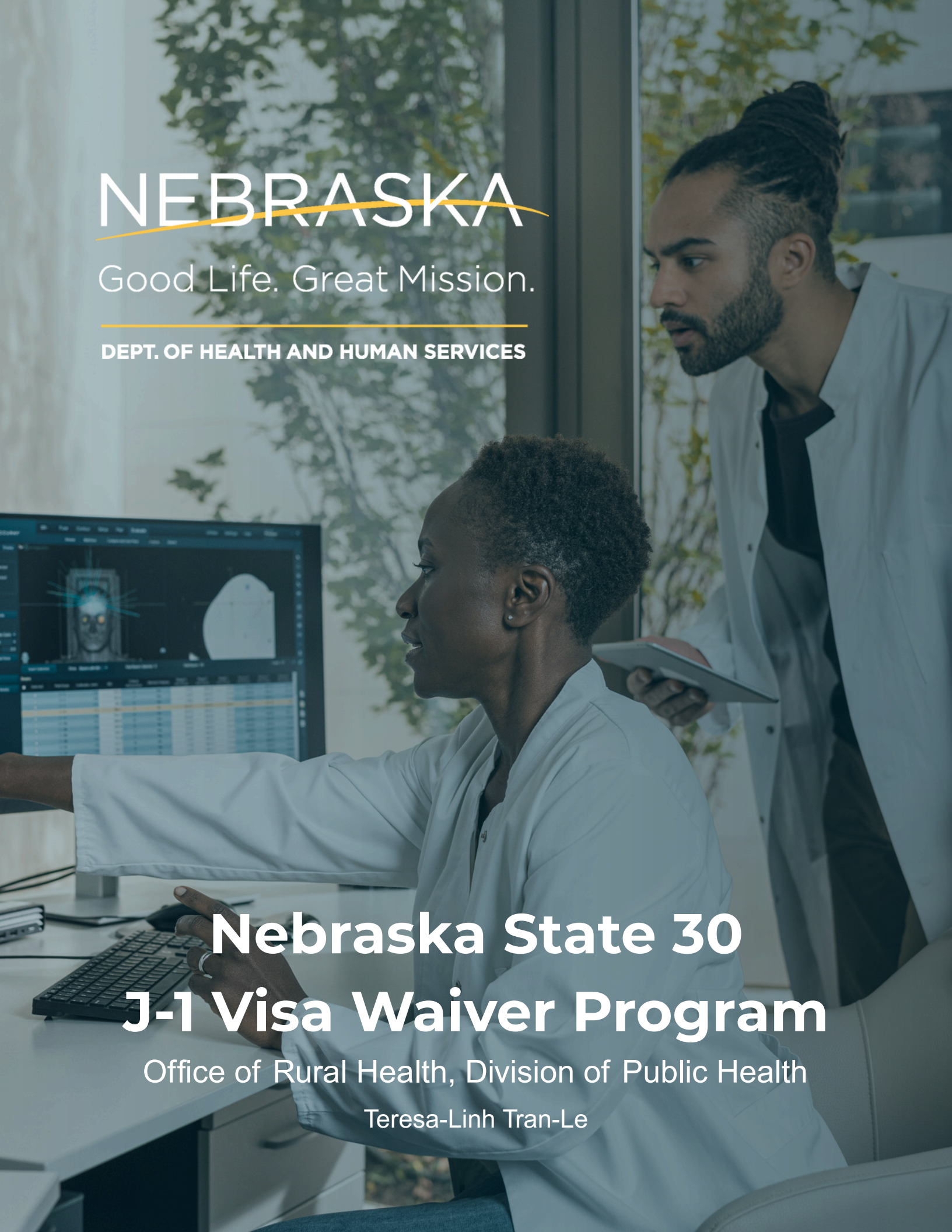

Nebraska State 30 J-1 Visa Waiver Program

Office of Rural Health, Division of Public Health

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INTRODUCTION

The Conrad 30 Program was created in 1994 to help provide federal shortage areas with physician services and allows J-1 foreign medical graduates to apply for a waiver of the **2-year** foreign residence upon completion of the J-1 exchange visitor program. This can be seen in section 214(l) of the Immigration Nationality Act (INA). Each state can sponsor **up to 30 physicians per year** through this program, and has developed their own application rules and guidelines.

This Nebraska State 30 Program has been implemented since 2001 by the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services and is the only program that sponsors J-1 visa waivers within the state.

Participation by the State of Nebraska in the J-1 Visa Waiver program is **entirely voluntary** and occurs in response to requests from organizations seeking to sponsor healthcare providers with J-1 visas. To qualify, sponsors must first demonstrate that they have been unable to fill the position with a U.S.-born provider. In return for a three-year service commitment in a designated area of need, the usual two-year requirement for J-1 visa holders to return to their home country is waived. This enables J-1 physicians to begin practicing in the United States immediately and puts them on a pathway toward obtaining an H-1B visa or permanent residency.

Since 2001, the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services has approved 344 J-1 Visa Waiver applications. Once approved at the state level, these applications are forwarded to the U.S. Department of State and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services for further review and final approval.

APPLICATION AND REVIEW PROCESS

GENERAL DISCRIPTION

The State of Nebraska reviews and submits applications received within two weeks of receiving them. The application and letter of support are sent to the Department of State and generally takes **30 – 120 days** for approval by both the Department of State and Homeland Security.

Figure 1
Key Steps for J-1 Visa Waiver Program

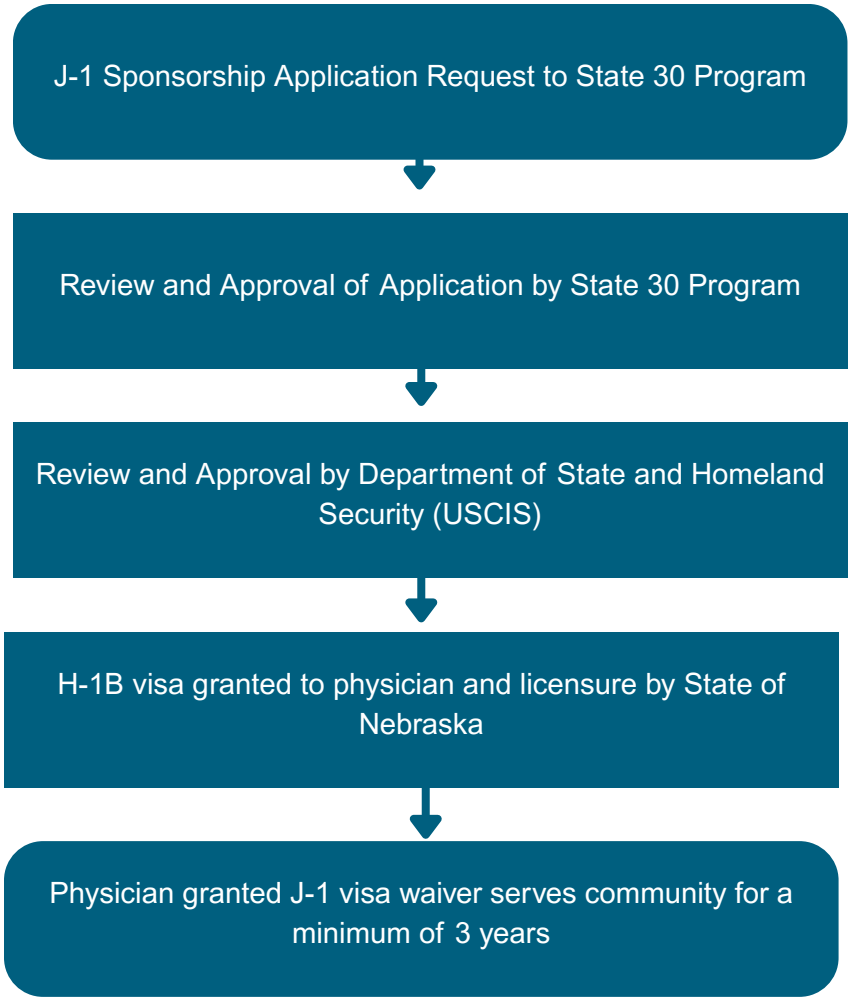

Figure 1 is a flowchart that illustrates the key steps from initial application submission through final approval and service obligation.

APPLICATION AND REVIEW PROCESS

PRIORITY FACTORS

Nebraska's J-1 Visa Waiver Program follows established state guidelines to review and approve applications, recognizing that each case presents unique circumstances. Applications are evaluated individually, with certain factors receiving higher or lower priority based on the needs of the state and the rationale provided by the sponsoring entity. While these priorities guide the assessment process, no fixed weights are assigned; instead, each application is considered on a case-by-case basis.

Table 1
Factors Affecting High and Low Priority

FACTORS	HIGH PRIORITY	LOW PRIORITY
GEOGRAPHIC CONSIDERATION	Rural/In-State	Urban/Out of State
PROVIDER SPECIALTY	Primary Care/Psychiatry	Sub-Specialty
INSURANCE ACCESS	Sliding Fee/Medicare/Medicaid	Primarily Private Insurance
ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE	Community Based/Non-Profit	For-Profit

Table 1 outlines four factors that differentiate high and low priorities based on the state's need - geographic consideration, provider specialty, insurance access, and organizational structure.

State sponsorship for J-1 visa waivers is voluntary, and Nebraska's flexible guidelines are designed to adapt to changes in federal legislation. The effectiveness and efficiency of the program depend on strong collaboration among all participants. By providing clear guidance and a responsive review process, the Nebraska State 30 Program aims to ensure timely and fair consideration for all J-1 visa physician sponsorship requests.

KEY PROGRAM FINDINGS

APPROVED APPLICANTS

Since 2001, the Nebraska State 30 Program has approved **344** J-1 visa waiver applications, averaging about **14** applications per year. The number of approvals each year depends entirely on the volume and eligibility of requests submitted by sponsors that meet Nebraska's program guidelines. New and previous sponsors are asked to share their intentions and to seek assistance and conditional approval by the State of Nebraska. This significantly reduces unnecessary non-qualifying applications and the preparation time and effort involved.

Figure 2
Approved J-1 Waiver Applications Per Year from 2001 - 2024

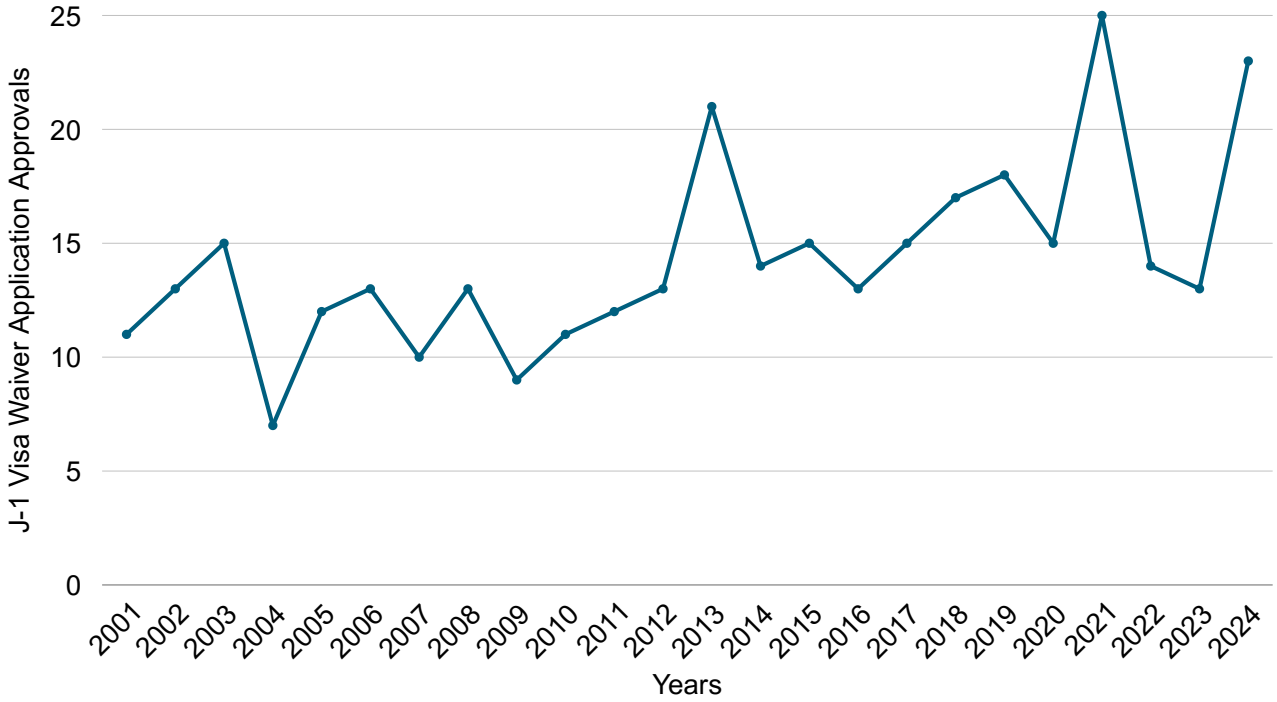

Figure 2 shows the number of J-1 visa waiver applications approved per year by the State of Nebraska from 2001 to 2024. The number of J-1 visa waiver applications approved has ranged from as few as seven in 2004 to 25 in 2021, with the latest being 22 approvals in 2024. The fluctuation can be a result of demand and eligibility requirements.

KEY PROGRAM FINDINGS

Throughout the span of this program in the state of Nebraska, **74** countries have been represented by participating physicians, which spans across six continents. There is particularly a strong representation from India, with almost **30%**, and Pakistan, with almost **10%,** of applications.

These international physicians bring specialized training and cultural perspectives that enhance patient care across the state, particularly in underserved and rural communities. Their contributions have been instrumental in addressing physician shortages while simultaneously enriching Nebraska's healthcare system with diverse medical approaches and cultural competencies.

Figure 3
Percent of Approved J-1 Waiver Applicants by Country of Birth from 2001 - 2024

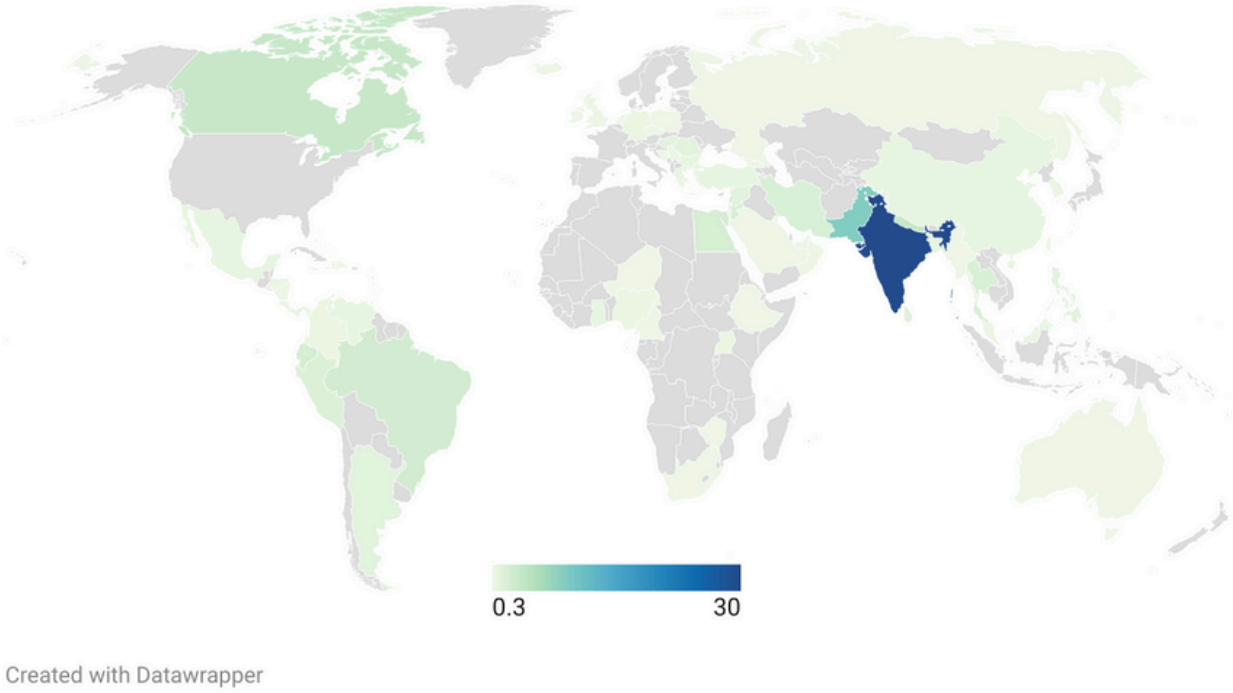

Figure 3 indicates the countries of birth for physicians who have participated in the Nebraska program, illustrating the diversity brought to the state's healthcare workforce through the J-1 visa waiver program.

KEY PROGRAM FINDINGS

SPECIALTY DISTRIBUTION

The average number of J-1 visa waiver sponsorships since 2001 for the Nebraska State 30 Program is 14 physicians per year. Over the past 23 years, **77.3%** (266/344) of J1 visa waivers approvals were for sub-specialists, **16.9%** (58/344) were for primary care providers and **5.8%** (20/344) were for mental health providers.

Figure 4A
Percentage of Specialists from 2001 - 2024

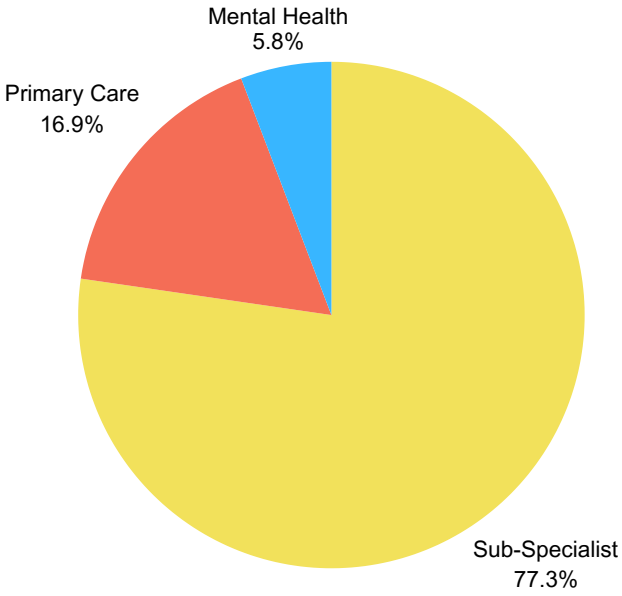

Figure 4B
Range of Specialists from 2001 - 2024

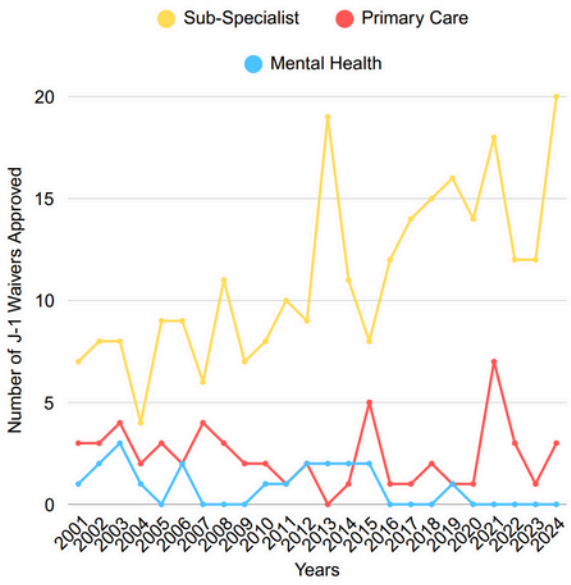

Figure 4A showcases the types of specialties which have been categorized. For the categories, mental health includes psychiatry, primary care includes internal medicine. pediatrics, and family medicine, and sub-specialties include neurology, hospitalist, hematology/oncology and more that aren't listed.

Figure 4B illustrates J-1 visa approvals in Nebraska from 2001 to 2024, categorized by provider specialty. Over this period, the number of sub-specialist providers has risen, while there has been a decline in mental health and primary care providers. This shift may reflect both the overall increase in J-1 visa waivers and a greater number of J1 physicians entering sub-specialty programs compared to primary care. Retention considerations by sponsoring communities could also contribute to these trends.

KEY PROGRAM FINDINGS

GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION

To analyze the distribution of specialties, counties have been categorized as either rural or urban. According to the U.S. Census, urban counties must encompass at least 2,000 housing units or have a population of at least 5,000. Rural encompasses all population, housing, and territory not included within an urban area. For the purposes of this report, we use these definitions of rural and urban areas.

Figure 5
Proportion of Specialists from 2001 - 2024

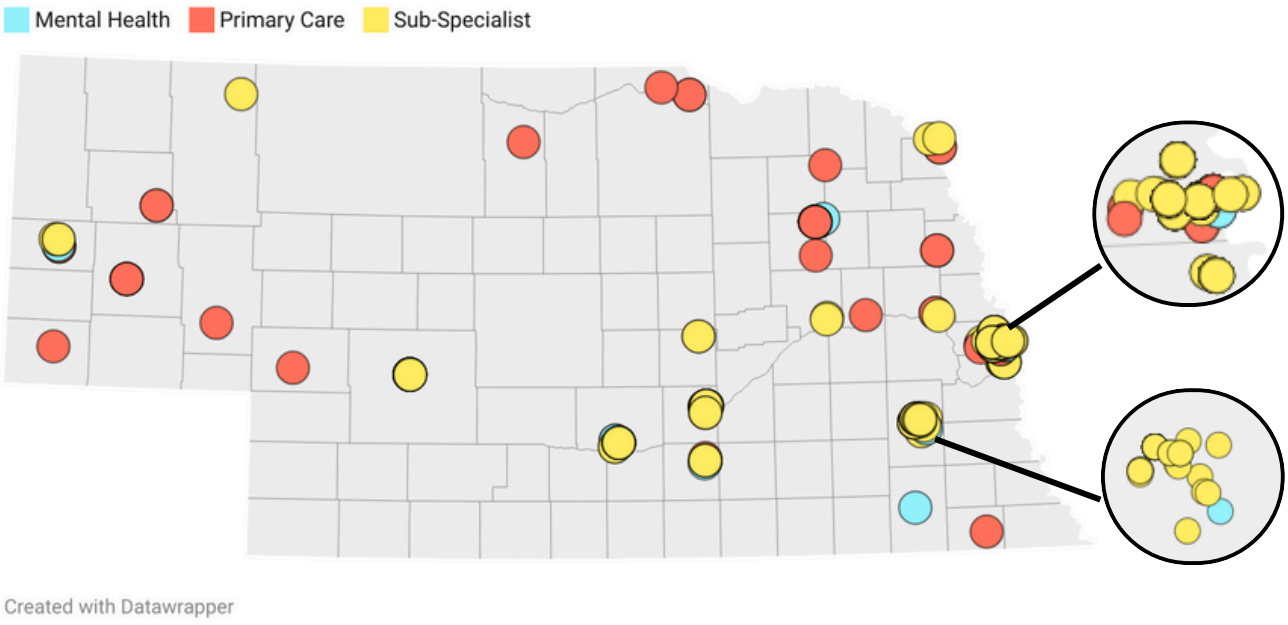

Figure 5 shows the relative proportion of each specialty (Mental Health, Primary Care, and Sub-Specialist) in each of the counties that have facilities participating in the Nebraska State 30 Program between 2001 and 2022. Counties with regional or urban hospitals tend to have a higher proportion of J-1 sponsored physicians who are sub-specialists. These counties also have populations large enough to support psychiatrists and other mental health providers.

KEY PROGRAM FINDINGS

Over the past 23 years, the number of both rural and urban J-1 visa waivers has **increased** in Nebraska. Rural areas comprise the majority of sponsored J-1 visa primary care physicians. From 2001, the percent of J-1 sponsored physicians is **61.9% in urban areas** versus **38% in rural areas.**

Figure 6
Comparison of J-1 Waiver Approvals Based on Provider's Primary Practice Location from 2001 - 2024

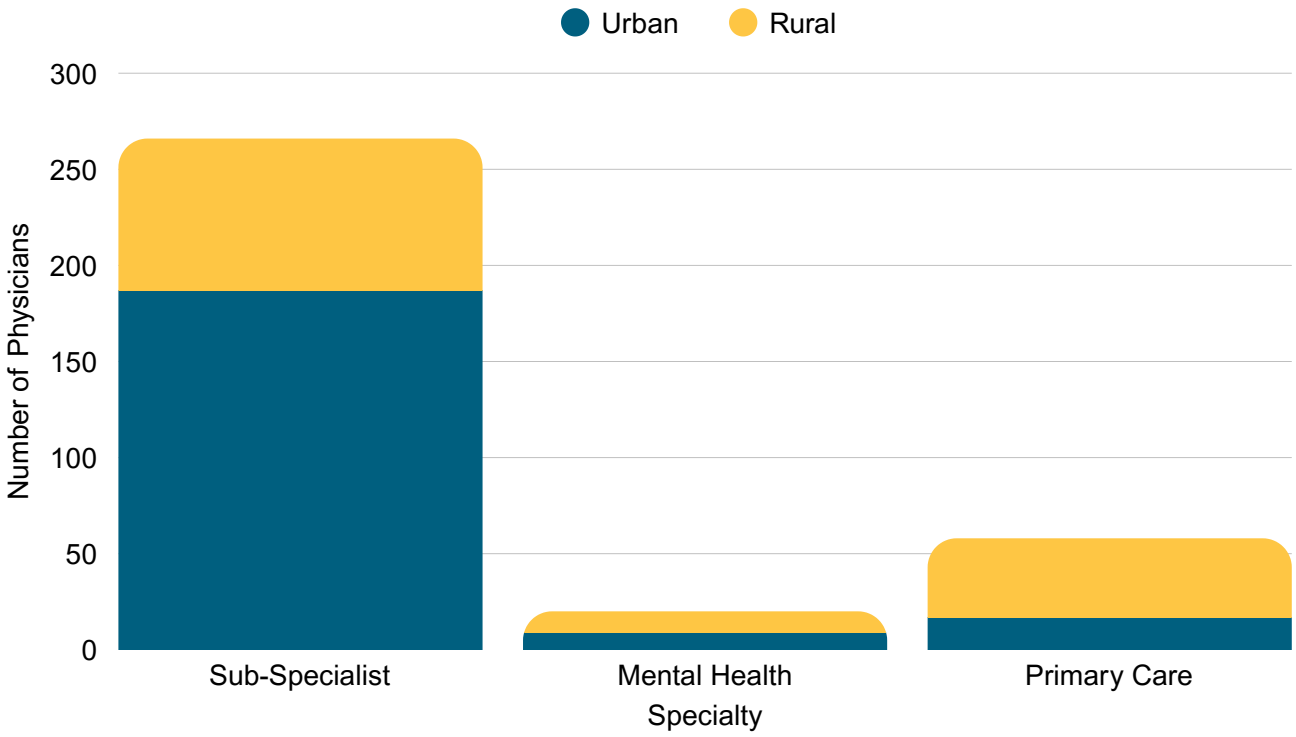

Figure 6 shows that physicians with a sub-specialty have always comprised the largest number of those sponsored in urban and rural areas of Nebraska. The increase in rural sponsored J-1 physicians and the increase in the number of sub-specialty physicians indicates that larger rural communities are also finding the program to be a better fit for sub-specialists.

RETENTION AND OUTCOMES

TENURE AND RETENTION

Since 2001, the Nebraska J-1 Visa Waiver Program has sponsored 344 physicians to serve in areas of need across the state. While all participating physicians complete the federally mandated three-year service commitment, retention beyond this period remains a challenge. Data show that **52.3%** (180/344) of J-1 physicians did not remain in Nebraska after fulfilling their obligation, while **47.7%** (continue to serve in Nebraska. These numbers includes those who have not yet completed their obligation and therefore is a conservative method of measuring average number of years served. This underlines the ongoing need for strategies to improve long-term retention of these providers in the state.

Figure 7
Percentages of Physician Retention in Nebraska After Their Three-Year Tenure

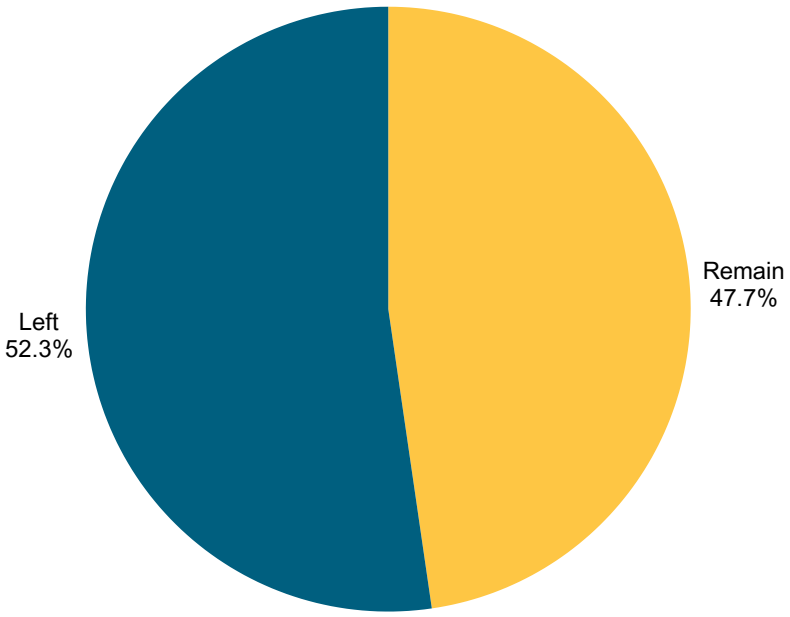

Figure 7 illustrates the proportion of J-1 physicians remaining in Nebraska verses those who left the state post-obligation period.

RETENTION AND OUTCOMES

SURVEY OUTCOMES

A survey of J-1 sponsored physicians was nationally conducted in 2022 using the Provider Retention and Information System Management (PRISM). Several states, including Nebraska, utilized the PRISM survey process. This aids in monitoring and providing feedback to sites and providers on issue to help address program improvements and assist retention efforts.

Findings include:

- Most physicians were challenged to find a practice that would support them on a J-1 visa waiver that met their professional and especially their personal and community needs
  - **80%** are working in states where they had not previously lived or trained

- **Four out of five** physicians work in states where they had not previously lived or trained
  - In choosing their practices, **two-thirds** sacrificed some of their professional needs and **three-quarters** sacrificed personal or community needs

- After working there for a year, most physicians found their jobs to be what they expected when they had agreed to work there
  - O**ne-third** found their incomes and number of work hours were not what they expected

- Most physicians report that their communities provide them and their families with the things that are important to them, good friends, and safety

- As a group, physicians' report greatest satisfaction with their relationships with patients and with the other physicians and staff of their practices
  - They report least satisfaction with the administration of their practices and having adequate time away from work.

- About **75%** would recommend their practices to others holding J-1 visa waivers

- **50%** of physicians anticipate that they will remain in their practices at least 24 months beyond their three-year visa waiver term

- Overall, **36%** of physicians are satisfied overall, **38%** are neutral, and **26%** are dissatisfied with the J-1 visa waiver program nationally

RESOURCES AND CONTACT INFORMATION

ADDITIONAL MEASURES

The process of measuring retention may be compared by a number of methods to help identify program or service area issues. There is a desire to conduct more in-depth analysis and comparisons of various program types to determine where and how program improvements may be made. **The State of Nebraska will continue to analyze the surveys conducted through PRISM to improve physician experiences and monitor practice location(s) of sponsored J-1 visa physicians through the University of Nebraska Medical Center's Health Professions Tracking Service.**

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- BridgeUSA Program Page
- DHHS Program Page
  - Guidelines and Application Information
  - Interest Waiver Application Form
  - Evaluation Process
- PRISM J-1 Visa Waiver 2022 Survey Report (Jan 2023)
- Health Affairs Scholar Research Article (August 2024)

QUESTIONS?

- Contact the Nebraska State Office of Rural Health, Department of Health and Human Services
  - (402) 471-2337

Updated July 2025