Barriers and Facilitators to Professional Licensure: Perspectives of Foreign Trained Pharmacists in Oregon

Policy research partners:
Oregon Commission on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs
Partners in Diversity
Oregon Workforce Investment Board
Office of the Governor for Workforce
Oregon Commission on Black Affairs

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Highly Educated Immigrant Integration as a Collective Benefit

Wasting human capital is **EXPENSIVE**.

1) Loss of educational investment made outside of the US.
2) Foregone tax revenues for the state.
3) Crowding of Low skill jobs.
4) Failing to meet employer needs across the state.
5) Lack of economic independence for emerging communities.
The Case of Oregon

• 1 in 10 Oregonians is Foreign born.
• Immigrants are more likely than native born to have college degrees.
• In 2010, the number of high-skilled immigrants exceeded the number of low-skilled immigrants for the first time.
• The change is more pronounced in Oregon, where the number of immigrants with a college degree increased by 61.4% between 2000 and 2011.
Skilled Immigrants Entry Barriers to Regulated Employment

Licensing barriers

• Lack of higher-level English classes geared to specific industries.
• Lack of information on how to overcome the licensing examination elements.
• Lack of higher education “bridge programs” directed to Foreign trained graduates.

Social barriers

• Loss of place-based social and professional network.
• Employer misperceptions about foreign education and work experience.
• Immigrant organizations are less prepared to serve the internationally educated groups.
# The Process of Licensure for Foreign Trained Pharmacists

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Cost</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The application process to be qualified for Licensure</td>
<td>$450</td>
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<tr>
<td>2a</td>
<td>The Equivalency Examination (FPGEE)</td>
<td>$750</td>
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<tr>
<td>2b</td>
<td>The English Proficiency Test (TOEFL)</td>
<td>$195</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The application process for the Oregon Intern license</td>
<td>$90</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>The Oregon Internship requirement (1440 hours)</td>
<td>$575</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>The North American Pharmacist Licensure Examination (NAPLEX)</td>
<td>$575</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>The Pharmacy Jurisprudence Examination (MPJE)</td>
<td>$250</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>The application for a Pharmacist License</td>
<td>$180</td>
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Licensed in Oregon
“It’s a very difficult period the TOEFL. For us, it’s very destructive”.
Female Participant, Foreign Trained

“The TOEFL is $200 if the person passed after the first trial, if you don’t pass you pay another $200 so it adds up. I know people who to this day, just the TOEFL is costing them $2,000, just the TOEFL.”
Male Participant, Foreign Trained

“The biggest challenge, which is the biggest demotivation for all the foreign pharmacists coming to US is the TOEFL, because the other things it can be, you know, you can work through life, you get certified as an intern pharmacist, at least you are working in your job. But without passing the TOEFL, you will not be able even to practice your job.”
Male Participant, Foreign Trained
The Internship Search

“For the internship, it wasn’t so easy. I searched like every single pharmacy in Portland and I sent some mails to them, I emailed some pharmacies, I called others, emailed, I sent them letters asking questions about internships. I sent requests to approximately 50 pharmacies in Portland and most of them rejected my request and there are other candidates who can fill the job better than you. Finally, I found a pharmacy that is a compounding pharmacy and because I have experience in compounding and they were in need of a compounding technician but because they couldn’t find one, they accepted to hire me as an intern.”

Male Participant, Foreign Trained

“I’m applying now for my internship license, I couldn’t convince them that I am good, that I’m able to do that job because they always think that I am a foreign graduate, I don’t have the experience I don’t have the kind of experience that they want here in the US, yeah so that doesn’t help me to find the right job that I need to be in.”

Male Participant, Foreign Trained
Meeting the Minimum Eligibility Requirements

“The FPGEC requires that if you graduated prior to January 1, 2003, you must have completed at least a four-year pharmacy curriculum at the time of graduation. If you graduated on or after January 1, 2003, you must have completed at least a five-year pharmacy curriculum at the time of graduation. The change from a four-year to five-year educational curriculum requirement has enabled the FPGEC Certification Program to be consistent with the revised standards of US pharmacy school curriculum.”
(The Foreign Pharmacy Graduate Examination Committee, 2016)
Meeting the Minimum Eligibility Requirements (Case1)

“I knew that this was one of the requirements but I’ve tried, I thought to myself I’ll come to the United States and explain this to the board because I have a registration from the board of pharmacy in Jordan. But the ministry of health in Jordan prohibits giving a license to any Iraqi. I knew about that but I thought I have no options, I’ll come here and maybe things would be easier or maybe it would be easier for me to go back to Iraq. I applied in America and talked to the board of pharmacy to see if there could be an easier path and I go to Iraq. They refused and I mean an unquestionable refusal. They absolutely refused to let me take the exam even though the Jordanian ministry of health recognizes me as a pharmacist but can’t give me a permit to work.”

Male Participant, Foreign Trained
Meeting the Minimum Eligibility Requirements (Case2)

“All the licensing process is this thing, it’s impossible. They need to do something about who come from different countries that don’t have all the requirements they are asking for. They need to have other solutions for them not just “go finish one year and come back” but where do I go finish this year? Provide me with some universities that would accept me to complete this year then I would be qualified to take the exam that would be okay but when they say, “That’s it. You are not qualified to take the exam, we can’t take you, we can’t accept you to take the exam you just need to go study one more year and come back.” Okay, where do I go one more year? Which subjects do you want me to re-study? What courses do you want me to take? So this is insane, it’s impossible for people like me.”

Female Participant, Foreign Trained
Policy Options: Educational Access at ALL Levels

• An advanced English training program to pass licensing examinations for highly educated refugees and immigrants (e.g. Pharmacists, dentists, engineers...) should be a high priority of all the community-based organizations.

• The schedule of training sessions should be sensitive to time constraints of persons who have jobs; special effort should be made to target the schedule to the female refugees who have children, especially the single mothers.
Policy Options: Mentorship Networks & Training

- A Mentorship network designed to pair foreign-trained pharmacists with pharmacists already licensed and working in the community.

- Supervised training/internship opportunities (Employer Partnerships).

- Access to mentors can play a vital role in the re-construction of immigrants’ and refugees’ professional identity as well as providing a context for understanding broader social and cultural norms that are essential for practice.
Policy Options: Targeted Information

- Providing industry-specific information and orientations to help newcomers navigate the certification/licensing requirements.
- Easier access to state and industry specific guides.
- Individualized career guidance and ongoing case management.
Policy Options: Participant Development

• Community leaders from among the refugee and immigrant groups should be mobilized and consulted to help develop policies, program interventions, and self-help initiatives that would enable the Highly Educated groups to work their way out of unemployment/underemployment and toward economic stability.
Thank you!

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