

## Summary

# 2023 Occupational Licensing Trends

Updated April 19, 2024 | Annie Miller, Steffi Lewis, Zaakary Barnes

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## Key Takeaways

**Occupational licensing policy remained a priority for legislatures throughout 2023.**

**State legislatures have taken lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic and applied them to occupational licensing policy, with a particular focus on healthcare professionals.**

**Recurring reforms centered on enhancing license portability, streamlining licensure processes and requirements, and reducing barriers to licensure.**

## Enhanced Portability

Interstate compact laws allow professionals to practice across multiple jurisdictions with standardized licensing requirements, providing enhanced portability. Compacts can aid in addressing regional shortages of skilled professionals, while still maintaining state sovereignty over licensing regulations.

Compacts are overseen by a third-party, non-state government entity, which allows the structure to transcend state borders. Those who are licensed in member states of the compact can practice within any other member state, if they meet the proper requirements. Arkansas enacted interstate compact legislation for a variety of healthcare professions in 2023, including [audio and speech language pathology](#), [occupational therapy](#), and [counseling](#). Similarly, [Hawaii](#) has entered an interstate compact for health care professionals to strengthen access to health care and develop pathways to licensure that complement the existing licensing and regulatory authority.

In 2023, there was a particular emphasis on developing compact laws for medical-related occupations. At least 11 states have established compact laws for medical professionals, including professionals in dentistry and mental health. To name a few, [Hawaii](#), [Minnesota](#) and [Utah](#) have legislated interstate medical licensure compacts.

## Study/Oversight Committees

State legislatures are increasingly establishing study committees and regulatory boards to address and enhance the efficacy, portability, and integrity of licensing requirements. Several states, including [Georgia](#) and [Hawaii](#), have established working committees dedicated to enhancing portability, which refers to the easy transfer of credentials and qualifications from one state to another without facing significant barriers.

Additionally, there has been an effort to track the demographics of those who are applying for and receiving occupational licenses. [Illinois](#), for example, has created an annual report displaying the demographic

information of those who were either approved or denied licensure, including their sex, ethnicity, race, and disability, among others.

In addition to the creation of study committees, many states are also implementing various task forces, committees and boards dedicated to the review and oversight of licensure processes for specific occupations. [Idaho](#) established an occupational and professional licensure review committee. In addition to conducting [sunrise and sunset](#) review, Idaho's committee will study occupational licensing and certification laws to determine how to ease occupational barriers while maintaining public health and safety standards.

Several states have also established review boards regarding specific licenses and prioritized communities. [Arkansas](#) has required the study of naturopathic physicians and medicine, while [California](#) required the study of professional licensure for veterans and their spouses, as well as created study boards to recommend educational standards and solutions to workforce issues for nurses.

## Immigrants With Work Authorization

While interstate compacts operate to enhance portability, other licensing mechanisms can also achieve interstate mobility. Universal licensure and reciprocity agreements, as well as policies targeting a specific demographic, can be effective tools too. With recent influxes of migrant workers, many states are tackling barriers to work for immigrants with work authorization. [California's](#) Physicians and Dentists from Mexico Pilot Program allows individuals licensed in Mexico to practice in California for a defined period.

[Tennessee](#) has also created a universal licensure provision for international medical graduates. Universal licensure recognition will not only streamline the licensing process for international candidates, but also provide recognition of foreign credentials and eliminate repetitive training and residency requirements. The inclusion of various countries in reciprocity agreements expands the talent pool, potentially alleviating shortages in critical professions across the US.

See [Barriers to Work: Increasing Access to Licensed Occupations for Immigrants with Work Authorization](#) for additional state actions related to workforce development opportunities for immigrant populations.

## Individuals With Criminal Convictions

States have also continued to remove persistent barriers to work for individuals with criminal records. For instance, state lawmakers are increasingly interested in statutory provisions that automatically expunge a person's criminal record.

In 2023, [New York](#) enacted provisions for automatic expungement of certain misdemeanors and felony offenses. [New Mexico](#) provided for expungement of arrest and conviction records for certain cannabis offenses and revised the list of criminal records that cannot be considered in an application for public employment, licensure, or other authority to practice a trade, business or profession.

[Maine](#) has not yet established an expungement process, but instead created a criminal record review committee. This committee will be tasked with assessing potential criminal record expungement options, costs and benefits associated with these policies, and develop a management system for records, among other things.

See [Barriers to Work: Increasing Access to Licensed Occupations for Individuals with Criminal Records](#) for additional state actions related to workforce development opportunities for candidates with criminal convictions.