

Briefing for decision

Request for Delegation Changes – Training Visa United States

Date due to MO:	N/A	Action required by:	N/A
Security level:	IN CONFIDENCE	Reference:	H2025075085
To:	Hon Simeon Brown, Minister of Health		
Copy to:	Dr Dale Bramley, Chief Executive, Health New Zealand Audrey Sonerson, Director-General of Health, Ministry of Health		
Consulted:	Health New Zealand		
Proactive release:	This briefing for decision is proposed by the Ministry of Health for proactive release		

Contact for telephone discussion

Name	Position	Telephone
Allison Bennett	Group Manager Health System Setting	s 9(2)(a)
Richard Sullivan	Chief Clinical Officer, Health New Zealand	

Minister's office to complete:

- | | | |
|---|------------------------------------|--|
| ☐ Approved | ☐ Decline | ☐ Overtaken by events |
| ☐ Needs change | ☐ Seen | |
| ☐ See Minister's Notes | ☐ Withdrawn | |

Comment:

Briefing for decision

Request for Delegation Changes – Training Visa United States

Security level: IN CONFIDENCE

Date: 13 November 2025

To: Hon Simeon Brown, Minister of Health

Purpose of report

1. This briefing requests your approval to transfer delegations for Statements of Need and Letters of Exceptional Need from the position of Director-General of Health to that of the Chief Executive Health New Zealand (Health NZ) to improve operational efficiency.
2. These documents allow for New Zealand citizens and permanent residents to obtain training visas to participate in medical training in the United States of America (United States).

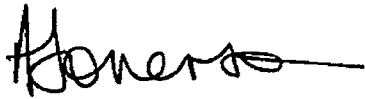
Summary

3. To undertake specialist medical training in the United States, foreign citizens require visa sponsorship from the Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG). To obtain sponsorship, applicants require a document called a Statement of Need to be issued by the applicant's home country's central health agency. For extended training (in excess of seven years), a Letter of Exceptional Need is also required.
4. Statements of Need and Letters of Exceptional Need must be signed by specific, nominated authorised signatories. ECFMG requires the list of nominated authorised signatories for a Statement of Need, and Letter of Exceptional Need, be signed by the Minister of Health, or the Minister's delegated authority.
5. In 2019, the role of Director-General of Health was delegated authority to sign these documents by the Minister of Health.
6. Following the 2022 health reforms, operational functions supporting offshore medical training were transferred to Health NZ. Consequently, Health NZ has requested that these delegations be transferred to the Chief Executive of Health NZ.
7. Both the Ministry of Health (the Ministry) and Health NZ support transferring these delegations to the Chief Executive of Health NZ as it would allow for better alignment of functions and will likely reduce administrative burden for both agencies.
8. Both the Ministry and Health NZ consider the risk of this delegation change to be low and note that ECFMG are broadly supportive.
9. The Ministry and Health NZ recommend you approve the transfer of delegation and sign the delegation letters.

Recommendations

We recommend you:

- | | |
|---|---------------|
| a) Agree to transfer the delegation of signing rights for the list of nominated authorised signatories for Statements of Need from the position of Director-General of Health to the position of Chief Executive, Health New Zealand, by signing the attached delegation letter. | Yes/No |
| b) Agree to transfer the delegation of signing rights for Letters of Exceptional Need from the position of Director-General of Health to the position of Chief Executive, Health New Zealand, by signing the attached delegation letter. | Yes/No |



Audrey Sonerson
Director-General of Health
Te Tumu Whakarae mō te Hauora
Ministry of Health

Date: 17 November 2025



Dr Richard Sullivan
Chief Clinical Officer
Tumu Haumanu
Health New Zealand

Date: 25 November 2025

Hon Simeon Brown
Minister of Health

Date:

Request for Delegation Changes – Training Visa United States

Background / context

Documentation is required for medical training visas in the United States

10. To take up specialist medical training positions in the United States, foreign citizens require visa sponsorship by the United States' Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG).
11. To process this visa, ECFMG require documents called Statements of Need, which must be issued by the central health agency of the applicant's "home" country (country of most recent legal permanent residence).
12. A Statement of Need confirms that the training the applicant intends to undertake is in an area for which there is a need, and that the applicant intends to return home at the conclusion of the training.
13. For training duration in excess of seven years, a Letter of Exceptional Need is also required, which must demonstrate exceptional need for the training.
14. Volume of applications is low, with Health New Zealand (Health NZ) receiving and issuing an average of five Statement of Need applications per annum and only two Letter of Exceptional Need applications since 2009.

Delegation currently sits with Director-General of Health

15. As per ECFMG requirements, Statements of Need and Letters of Exceptional Need must be signed by specific, nominated authorised signatories. ECFMG requires the list of nominated authorised signatories for a Statement of Need, and Letter of Exceptional Need, be signed by the Minister of Health, or the Minister's delegated authority.
16. The ECFMG allows for up to four nominated authorised signatories to sign Statement of Need, as persons authorised by the Minister (or the Minister's delegated authority). ECFMG requires these signatories to be both person- and role-specific.
17. In 2019, the role of Director-General of Health was authorised by the former Minister of Health to sign and maintain the list of signatories and to sign Letters of Exceptional Need [HR20190589 refers]. Currently, only two of the authorised signatories remain active due to staffing changes.
18. As part of the health reforms in 2022, the operational functions and designated signatory roles supporting offshore medical training, such as the Statement of Need and Letter of Exceptional Need process, were transferred to Health NZ.

Requests for transfer of delegations to Health NZ Chief Executive

19. As Health NZ is responsible for the employment of the designated signatory roles it has become more efficient for the signatory list to be maintained by Health NZ. Given this, Health NZ has requested the transfer of the delegations from the position of Director-General of Health to the position of the Chief Executive, Health NZ. As it is a delegation from the Minister of Health, it requires Ministerial approval to change.

20. It is anticipated that individuals filling such Health NZ roles as National Chief Medical Officer and the Chief Clinical Officer will be recommended as nominated signatories (four positions are available).

We support transfer of delegations

21. Both the Ministry and Health NZ support transferring the delegations to the Chief Executive of Health NZ as it would allow for better alignment of functions for both Health NZ and the Ministry and will likely reduce administrative burden for both agencies.
22. We consider the change to be low risk as the volume of applications are low.
23. s 9(2)(h)

24. ECFMG is aware of this potential transfer of delegation and has raised no concerns.
25. However, should you choose to retain delegations as they currently stand, Health NZ would be required to seek approval from the Director-General of Health to update the signatory list as and when people move out of a role. As the administrative burden in cross-agency papers is greater, and future signatories are anticipated to be Health NZ staff, this is not recommended.

Next steps

26. Should you agree to transfer the existing delegations from the position of Director-General of Health to the position of the Chief Executive, Health NZ then you would need to sign the delegation letters attached to this report.
27. If you agree to shift delegations, Health NZ will obtain approval from Chief Executive Officer, Health NZ for a revised list of appropriate nominated authorised signatories.
28. To ensure continuity in changeover, the existing current list of nominated authorised individuals will remain valid until replaced by the Chief Executive, Health NZ.

ENDS.