

New Executive Order Seeks to Reform Higher Education Accreditation, Including Medical Schools and Residency Programs

On April 23, 2025, President Donald Trump issued an [Executive Order](#) (EO) directing the Secretary of Education to investigate and hold accountable accreditors of institutions of higher education (IHEs) that engage in unlawful discriminatory practices through diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, and to reform and streamline the accreditation process to ensure that accredited IHEs offer high-quality, high-value education.

Key provisions in this new EO support the Administration's widespread efforts to eliminate unlawful DEI practices, which have taken the form of other executive orders, investigations by the [U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Service's \(HHS\) Office for Civil Rights \(OCR\)](#), the [U.S. Dept. of Education's \(U.S. Ed\) Office for Civil Rights \(OCR\)](#), and other agency action, including [revocation of and bans on National Institutes of Health \(NIH\) grants](#) to IHEs that have unlawful DEI programs.

Key Provisions of the Executive Order

The directives in the EO can be characterized by two overarching mandates: (i) ensuring that accreditors are not requiring IHEs seeking accreditation or reaccreditation to engage in unlawful DEI initiatives, and (ii) reforming the accreditation process and the landscape of U.S. Ed-recognized accreditors to promote "student-oriented accreditation."

Under the first mandate, the EO directs the Secretary of Education to, among other things:

- Deny, monitor, suspend, or terminate accreditation recognition of accreditors that fail to meet applicable recognition criteria or otherwise violate federal law, including by requiring IHEs seeking accreditation to engage in unlawful DEI initiatives;
- Investigate and terminate unlawful discrimination by U.S. law schools, medical schools, and graduate medical education entities; and
- Assess whether the American Bar Association's Council of the Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar (Council), the Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME), or the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME), or other accreditors of graduate medical education should be suspended or terminated as accrediting agencies under federal law.

Under the second mandate, the EO, among other things, directs the Secretary of Education to resume recognizing new accreditors to increase competition and accountability and promote high-quality, high-value academic programs focused on student outcomes and viewpoint diversity rather than DEI programs.

Implications on Accreditors and IHEs

The EO has both immediate and long-term implications for both accreditors and IHEs.

- **Impact on Currently Recognized Accreditors:** The EO specifically puts the Council, LCME and ACGME on notice of the risk of losing their “status as an accrediting agency under Federal law,” but all accreditors recognized by U.S. Ed may be at risk of suspension or termination of accreditation recognition. If U.S. Ed denies, limits, suspends, or terminates an accreditor’s recognition, the accreditor does have the opportunity to submit a written response addressing this determination and to otherwise contest the Secretary of Education’s final decision in the federal courts. However, while such actions play out, IHEs may find themselves without an accreditation organization able to accredit them.
- **Downstream Effects on IHEs and Students:** If currently recognized institutional accreditors lose accreditation recognition, IHEs accredited by such institutional accreditors may no longer meet Title IV eligibility requirements. IHEs that are accredited by the Council or LCME, in addition to another institutional accreditor, would still have access to Title IV funding if the Council or LCME were to lose accreditation recognition because the IHEs are not reliant on accreditation by the Council or LCME for Title IV eligibility purposes, but students graduating from law school or medical school ultimately may be impacted as state laws on professional licensure often require graduation from law schools or medical schools accredited by the Council or LCME, respectively. Further, given the ongoing OCR investigations and the EO’s directive that noncompliance findings of such investigations be shared with accreditors, it is expected that accreditors will be asked to take accreditation actions against member institutions that are found to be noncompliant with Title IV and Title IX requirements.

IHA will continue to monitor developments relating to this EO.

For additional information, please contact Karen Harris at kharris@team-ih.org.