Visa Restrictions for Immigrants May Stall Cancer Research

International cancer researchers and oncologists are among those affected by the H-1B visa freeze in Texas.

August 4, 2026 By Eva Lorenz

In January, Texas Governor Greg Abbott launched an investigation into the federal H-1B visa program and barred public colleges, universities and state agencies from filing new applications without Texas Workforce Commission permission through May 31, 2027. Now, nearly six months after the restriction took effect, cancer advocates and immigration attorneys warn about the policy's potential impact on the state's groundbreaking cancer research, reports The Texas Tribune.

H-1B visas require at least a bachelor's degree and are for people filling specialty occupations or providing services of exceptional merit, such as researchers, professors, physicians and engineers.

"Those researchers and professors are just going to go to other U.S. universities," Austin-based immigration attorney Jason Finkelman told News From the States, following the announcement of the visa restriction. "So we're going to lose the talent we need here for universities, which is going to contribute to our downfall as being leaders in the face of higher education."

The H-1B visa program was integral to making Texas a cancer research powerhouse. In 2008, Texas established the Cancer Prevention and Research Institute of Texas (CPRIT), which since its founding has awarded over $4 billion in 2,285 grants toward cancer prevention and treatment development. The MD Anderson Cancer Center at the University of Texas has received more than $745 million from CPRIT and employs 277 workers through the H-1B program. What's more, MD Anderson is ranked No. 1 in the nation for cancer care, according to U.S. News & World Report's 2026–2027, a ranking the institution has maintained for the past 12 years.

According to The Texas Tribune:

> “At MD Anderson Cancer Center, researchers holding H-1B work visas explore why tumors resist treatment, test new drugs and use artificial intelligence to analyze tissue cell by cell. Records obtained by The Texas Tribune show the Houston institution sponsors 277 workers through the program.
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> Across Texas, 44 public universities, health centers and system offices reported sponsoring 3,332 H-1B workers to the Texas Workforce Commission. The higher education institutions had to detail their use of such employees as part of Abbott’s directive.”

State Representative Ann Johnson, who underwent treatment for thyroid cancer at MD Anderson, told the Tribune she did not believe Abbott’s directive was really aimed at stopping fraud in the H-1B program.

“You’re not stopping fraud,” Johnson said. “You’re stopping a patient from getting the finest care from the finest doctor in the world because they’re no longer welcome in Texas.”

To learn more about MD Anderson’s recent scientific breakthroughs, check out these Cancer Health stories:

- “Higher Bacteria Levels Inside Tumors Can Promote Immunotherapy Resistance,”
- “Zedoresertib and Lunresertib Combination Shows Promising Antitumor Activity,”
- “Tile-Based Radiation Therapy Lowers Risk of Recurrence in Brain Metastases” and
- “Immune-Targeting Vaccine Shows Promise Intercepting Cancer in Patients With Lynch Syndrome.”

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