

## Five New Bills You Need To Know

### AAAOM DETAILS PUSH FOR FIVE NEW BILLS TO HELP ACUPUNCTURISTS

Editorial Staff

Throughout the last year, AAAOM (American Association of Acupuncture & Oriental Medicine) has been busy working on drafting a series of five new federal acupuncture bills. These five bills will have a direct impact on acupuncturists around the country as the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act rolls in.

AAAOM leaders answered a few pressing questions about the bills for *Acupuncture Today* and detailed how you can get involved.

*AT*: Can you tell us about the five bills AAAOM is currently drafting?

AAAOM: The 2010 Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA) includes a number of provisions that prohibit discrimination against state-licensed complementary and alternative professionals and mandates their participation in the healthcare system and newly-formed medical home. The law contains provisions that ensure patients have access to acupuncture and Oriental medicine. However, much depends on how state and federal regulators interpret and implement the provisions of the law.

In response to these major legislative developments and healthcare language, the AAAOM has drafted five bills addressing three major issues facing the profession:

- Reinforcing non-discrimination specifically for acupuncturists
- Authorization to work in mainstream medical facilities and federal healthcare programs
- Eligibility to get reimbursed by federal and relevant state programs

These five draft bills provide guidance on the proper implementation of the issues discussed above in the areas of

1. Defense Health, our nation's program serving active duty service members, National Guard and Reserve members, retirees, their families, survivors and certain former spouses worldwide.
2. Veterans Administration, America's largest integrated health care system with over 1,700 sites of care, serving 8.3 million Veterans each year.
3. Medicare, the federal health insurance program for people who are 65 or older, certain younger people with disabilities, and people with End-Stage Renal Disease.
4. Federal Health Employees Benefits which provides healthcare to federal employees, retirees and their survivors who enjoy the widest selection of health plans in the country
5. Public Health Service Corps, a team of more than 6,500 highly qualified, public health professionals. The Commissioned Corps officers work for Federal agencies, such as the Indian Health Service and Bureau of Prisons, on the forefront of public health treating individuals that need it most. The Corps' officers are dedicated to public health promotion, disease prevention, and the advancement of public health science. More information on each of these bills can be found on the AAAOM website [www.aaamonline.org](http://www.aaamonline.org).

*AT:* What is the next process to get these bills moving along?

*AAAOM:* To move these bills forward, we first need to establish a level of consensus within our AOM community so their content is agreed upon by a large number of us. In parallel to this, we are establishing working relationships with congressional leaders and staff to educate them on our key issues and to solicit their support for our initiatives.

*AT:* What states have already passed legislation to add acupuncture as a mandatory healthcare benefit to all individual and small group health insurance plans?

*AAAOM:* Six states and four territories currently mandate acupuncture coverage as a part of the Essential Health Benefits program as detailed in the Affordable Care Act. Nearly 54 million people will now have access to acupuncture coverage. This means practitioners in Washington, Maryland, California, Alaska, Nevada, New Mexico, as well as American Samoa, Guam, North Mariana Island and the Virgin Islands will not only be able to serve more patients but will grow their practices by millions of dollars.

*AT:* What other initiatives is AAAOM involved in when it comes to implementation and access to acupuncturist services and acupuncture on the federal level?

*AAAOM:* As detailed in our 2013-2016 Strategic Plan, the AAAOM is focused on growing in three distinct categories: Advocacy, Advancing the Profession, and Membership. At a high level, some of the key initiatives that reside within those categories are: 1) educating the public, legislators, institutions, and insurers about AOM; 2) drafting competencies, standards, and legislation that accurately reflect and protect the future of the profession, and 3) building our membership services and programs to ensure we are growing the organization that is setup to protect the today and tomorrow of AOM.

*AT:* What are some of the obstacles that your organization is currently facing when it comes to these five bills?

*AAAOM:* The key obstacles are both internal and external in nature. For example: 1) the need to arrive at some level of consensus within our AOM community so we can speak to the public and our legislators with one voice; 2) an effort of this magnitude requires staff, lobbyists, political contributions, research, and legal support. The hiring of high caliber experts to serve in these roles is both time consuming and costly, making it very challenging for our field to accomplish these goals without proper funding from our community, and 3) it is challenging to find internal advocates within institutions and insurers with whom we are looking to influence and solicit support due to the fact that we are not consistently training our students and having practitioners participate in these major systems (Medicare, Tricare, limited participation with hospitals and insurance programs, etc.).

*AT:* What can practitioners do to get involved?

*AAAOM:* In 2012, thanks to the efforts of the AAAOM and our national and state association partners, NEARLY 54 MILLION AMERICANS IN SIX STATES and this is just the tipping point. The next 17 months represent a crucial period of time for all practitioners to ensure that their patients are empowered to communicate their needs to congress in one united voice. Healthcare is evolving with or without us; it is essential that acupuncture and Oriental medicine be included as part of these changes. As more and more audiences promote the benefits of AOM—patients, clinicians, policymakers, etc.—the time has never been better to present a unified voice supporting federal recognition of our medicine. We encourage our AOM community to:

- work closely with their national association to ensure our profession, our patients, and our advocates are communicating with one voice to congress
- become a member of the AAAOM and support the fundraising initiatives by minimally contributing 50 cents per day to the viability of your professional future
- download educational materials from our website to empower your patients, friends, and family members to advocate on behalf of the profession to their congressional leaders and staff
- at the AAAOM website, [www.aaaomonline.org](http://www.aaaomonline.org) use our congressional letter tool to easily submit a request for support to your legislator and sign up on our mailing list for timely advocacy updates.

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