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## **National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (NCCAOM®) BLS Fact Sheet:**

### **Introduction:**

U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics (BLS) stating that “Acupuncturists” now have an independent Standard of Occupational Code (SOC). The new code for Acupuncturists, SOC – 29-1291, will be included in the next edition of the BLS Occupational Handbook, which will be published in 2018. The NCCAOM has developed a list of frequently asked questions, below, to provide our Diplomates with information about this recent announcement from the BLS.

### ***Q. (1). What is the role of the BLS in relation to our profession?***

**A.** In an effort to fully understand the role that BLS can play with assisting the AOM profession in gaining federal recognition, it is necessary to examine the agency’s purpose. The BLS has multiple functions, with its main mission to act as a fact-finding agency for the federal government in the broad field of labor economics and statistics. In order to fulfill this mission, it is charged with collecting data, from each occupation, such as expected growth, job functions, training and education, practice settings, income of workers, and other important trends. This information is then used by the labor force within the profession, those who are interested in entering the profession, and federal government agencies. It tracks each profession by assigning a classification code, and then collects a set of data to measure whether the profession is thriving and/or changing in the United States.

### ***Q. (2). What is a Standard Classification Code and why is it so important for us to have a distinct code?***

**A.** The BLS is responsible for revising the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) system. This revision only occurs every eight years (last Occupational Outlook Handbook was published in 2010), and provides an unparalleled opportunity for the AOM profession to gain greater federal recognition. Data collected, classified and published by the BLS is used by the Federal statistical agencies to assign workers into occupational categories for the purpose of collecting, calculating, or disseminating data on occupations. This process also lays the groundwork for AOM practitioners to be able to participate in federal loan repayment programs, receive

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recognition from federal agencies such as the Dept. of Veteran Affairs, and paves the way for acupuncture services to be included in Medicare, etc.

Anyone who has visited the BLS website ([www.bls.gov](http://www.bls.gov)) or happened to glance at the voluminous Occupational Outlook Handbook, which contains a classification of hundreds of occupations in the United States, will agree that it can be quite overwhelming. Making sense of occupational data is not always easy; therefore, the SOC system utilized by the BLS establishes that organization. According to the BLS staff, The SOC “assists federal statistical agencies in organizing the occupational data they collect, tabulate, and analyze. By classifying jobs into occupational categories, the SOC provides a standardized way for agencies to share their data.” This report also points out that the occupational data collected is shared by important agencies such as the U.S. Department of Labor, National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Defense, National Science Foundation, and U.S. Census Bureau; therefore, having a recognition of “Acupuncturists” as an occupation will lead to job classifications within these agencies.

***Q. (3). Why did it take so long for BLS to come up with our own SOC?***

Revising the SOC is a multi-year process, during which the interagency SOC Policy Committee (SOCPC) will formulate recommendations for revisions that are submitted to OMB for consideration. Before 2010, “acupuncture” was listed as a modality under other healthcare professions such as chiropractors and nurses. A search for the term “Acupuncturists” yielded no results. The proposal received by the BLS in 2008 resulted in the BLS’s SOC Policy Committee placing “Acupuncturists” in a classification under the major group of Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations (29-0000) and minor group of Health Diagnosing and Treating Practitioners (29-1000) in 2010.

The 2008 submission set the stage for the BLS to start gathering information on Acupuncturists through the Occupational Information Network (O\*NET) Data Collection Program which published the first tracking of the profession on the O\*NET website. The O\*NET program is the nation's primary source of occupational information. Central to the project is the O\*NET database, containing information on hundreds of standardized and occupation-specific descriptors. The database, which is available to the public via their website, is continually updated by surveying a broad range of workers from each occupation. One of the important functions of O\*NET, is that it is able to collect descriptive information on occupations that may not meet the criteria to have a distinct and separate code in the existing SOC. Even though “Acupuncturists” did not meet Classification Principle 9 (which states that for a detailed occupation to be included in the SOC as an independent profession either the BLS or the Census Bureau must be able to collect and report data on that occupation). “Acupuncturists” was identified for collection as an O\*NET “New and Emerging Occupation”. O\*NET also labeled “Acupuncturists” with a “bright outlook” logo, which means that the profession is expected to grow and has a positive outlook.

Anticipating the next revision scheduled for publication in 2018, the NCCAOM met with the BLS staff and used the demographic data from their 2013 Job Analysis to prepare the profession’s case for an independent SOC and sent the request following the 2014 call for proposals to the BLS’s SOC Policy Committee in July 2014.

**Q. (4). Will this Standard Occupational Code take effect immediately?**

A. No. Revising the SOC is a multi-year process -- the 2010 revision took about 5 years. For the 2018 revision, the SOC Policy Committee began planning in early 2012, and received public input through the first Federal Register notice in spring 2014. This process led to publication of the proposed revision for public comment through the second Federal Register notice in spring 2015 and publication of the final 2018 SOC structure in spring 2017.

On July 22, 2016, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) SOC Policy Committee (SOCPC) updated the [SOC website](#) to include the Federal Register notice (81 FR 48306) published by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) announcing the SOCPC's recommendations to OMB on the 2018 SOC which included the publication in the new independent SOC Acupuncturists: 29-1291. This publication will not take place until 2018. The SOCPC accepted NCCAOM's recommendation for an independent SOC based on the evidence provided that the work performed by Acupuncturists is sufficiently distinct to reliably collect data, as required by Classification Principle 9. The OMB will be reviewing the recommendations of the SOCPC

This website also provides SOCPC responses on public comments regarding changes for 2018 that were received as a result of the first Federal Register notice announcing the revision for 2018, published by OMB on May 22, 2014 (79 FR 29620).

The BLS response to the requests for Acupuncturists to have a unique SOC is available in [Docket Number 1-0144](#).

**Q. (5). What is the next step in this process?**

A. OMB, in consultation with the SOCPC, will review comments in response to this notice in making its final decisions for the 2018 revision and plans to publish its decisions in the Federal Register. A third notice announcing the final 2018 SOC structure and occupation codes and titles is expected by Spring 2017. The SOCPC then plans to finish preparing the Standard Occupational Classification Manual 2018 for publication, including finalizing occupational definitions, selecting associated job titles, and developing a crosswalk to the 2010 SOC.

The NCCAOM will be updating its website with any additional information leading up to the publication of the manual.

**Q. (6). Will this Standard Occupational Code help in recognition of Acupuncturists by Federal Government?**

Obtaining a unique SOC lays the groundwork for AOM practitioners to be able to participate in federal loan repayment programs, receive recognition from federal agencies such as the Dept. of Veteran Affairs, and paves the way for acupuncture services to be included in Medicare, etc. In order to earn a unique SOC, the BLS requires professions to be trackable and growing. Since BLS data is shared across federal agencies, acupuncturists' recognition through an independent SOC means it will appear as a specific job classification with U.S. Department of Labor, National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Defense, National Science Foundation, and U.S. Census Bureau.

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In addition, by receiving recognition as an occupation with a separate and distinct body of knowledge in acupuncture services, doors potentially open for greater reimbursement from insurance companies along with the possibility of Medicare reimbursement in the future.