



NCCAOM Advocacy Update April 2020

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The NCCAOM® Advocacy team continues to represent NCCAOM certification, Diplomates, and stakeholders by providing information to promote acupuncture services to state and federal policymakers to include the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), as well as other stakeholder groups.

COVID-19 Response

The NCCAOM recognizes that disruptions resulting from the COVID-19 emergency pose many professional challenges and uncertainties. While advocacy and government relations efforts below will continue, the NCCAOM government relations team has shifted its focus to advocating for acupuncturists during this emergency and keeping Diplomates informed and supported.

Through the CARES Act, the federal government has created or expanded several small-business relief programs to help small-business owners who cannot work or whose work is disrupted due to COVID-19. The NCCAOM created a [COVID-19 Resource Page](#) to provide Diplomates information about available resources, state and federal initiatives, and guidance for seeking small-business support.

The NCCAOM government relations team has also developed guidance documents to help Diplomates navigate relief provisions within the CARES Act:

- [CARES Act Summary](#)
- [PPP and EIDL Small-Business Loan Guidance](#)

Each week, the NCCAOM and the ASA host a town hall to keep acupuncturists informed of ongoing small-business relief initiatives and resources, telehealth options, legislative efforts, unemployment expansions, student resources, and what to expect in the near and long-term future for the profession and the U.S. response.



[April 1 Town Hall](#): Provided an overview of the CARES Act, practice guidance during COVID-19, telehealth options, herbal-supply lines, wellness during COVID-19, and the NCCAOM certification exam schedules and updates.

[April 7 Town Hall](#): Provided a deep dive into the CARES Act small-business components, herbal-supply lines.

April 14 Town Hall: Focuses on guidance for students and schools, exam-schedule modifications.

April 22 Town Hall: The NCCAOM government relations team will provide an overview of the latest federal government relief provisions (Phase IV of federal relief legislation), the affect the COVID-19 emergency will have on the profession's advocacy strategy, the profession post-COVID-19.

The NCCAOM government relations team is on hand to provide guidance to Diplomates on state and federal emergency-relief initiatives for small businesses and welcome your questions: advocacy@thenccaom.org. Relief efforts are changing each day. The NCCAOM government relations team actively monitors these developments and will continue to keep Diplomates updated.

CMS to Cover Acupuncture for Chronic Low-Back Pain

In January, CMS released a national coverage determination for acupuncture for chronic low-back pain (CLBP) that enables acupuncturists to provide services to Medicare beneficiaries. Shortly thereafter, the NCCAOM worked with the ASA to publish a [joint press release](#) explaining the decision.

While a great advancement for the profession, the rule as currently written requires acupuncturist to practice under supervision, which will restrict access to qualified acupuncturist. Because CMS does not currently recognize acupuncturists as providers, the Center had to designate acupuncturists as auxiliary personnel, who require supervision to provide services to Medicare beneficiaries.

CMS recognition requires an Act of Congress. The NCCAOM Advocacy team has ramped up efforts to advance viable legislation that would enable CMS to recognize acupuncturists as Medicare providers. Legislation is a long-term effort, but the NCCAOM has prioritized this initiative and will continue to keep its Diplomates updated.



The NCCAOM also recognizes that CMS’ stipulation that acupuncturists have a degree from an ACAOM-accredited program to provide services to Medicare beneficiaries prevents many qualified Diplomates from enrolling in Medicare. The NCCAOM team will continue to work with CMS on a solution that will enable qualified Diplomates to see Medicare patients.

The NCCAOM recognizes that many Diplomates are eager to begin Medicare’s enrollment process. Medicare enrollment is involved and takes several months. The NCCAOM will soon release a Medicare Provider Enrollment Toolkit that will provide step-by-step instructions for enrolling in Medicare, as well as include fact sheets about Medicare requirements, reimbursement information, and other common questions about Medicare enrollment.

The NCCAOM advocacy team has fielded many Diplomate inquiries about CMS’ coverage decision and welcomes the opportunity to provide information at any time. Please feel free to contact the NCCAOM advocacy team: advocacy@thenccaom.org.

Federal and State Initiatives and Partnerships

Voices for Non-Opioid Choices

The NCCAOM continues to participate in the Voices for Non-Opioid Choices, a multi-stakeholder coalition that help combat opioid overuse through its advocacy for alternative pain-management options such as acupuncture.

In late 2019, the NCCAOM lent its support for [H.R. 5172/S. 3067, the NOPAIN Act](#) (Non-Opioids Prevent Addiction In the Nation Act), which would incentivize practitioners to use non-opioid and non-pharmaceutical post-surgery pain-treatment options. Since then, the NCCAOM advocacy team have helped support the bill by participating in the Voice’s Capitol Hill meetings and making the case for acupuncture as a viable pain-management option.

In December, the NCCAOM also participated in the Voices Solutions Summit to discuss the Coalition’s strategic plan. As a founding member, the NCCAOM will continue to participate in Voices efforts to ensure that the acupuncture profession is a part of the larger discussions around non-opioid pain-management options.

Read more about the [Coalition](#).

NIH NCCIH Meeting

In January, members of the NCCAOM GR team met with the NIH’s National Institutes of Health’s National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health’s (NCCIH) team to



discuss initiatives to promote the acupuncture profession and to discuss acupuncture's role in combatting opioid overutilization.

The NCCAOM will continue to serve as a resource to the NCCIH as well as keep acupuncture on the NIH's radar as a viable and effective model of care.

AHRQ Systematic Review Comments

In February 2020, the NCCAOM worked with the AAMA and the ASA to respond to [AHRQ's Supplemental Evidence and Data Request on Treatments for Acute Pain: A Systematic Review](#). In addition to providing systematic evidence reviews related to acupuncture, the collective response emphasized the need more acupuncture-specific research to further strengthen its evidence-base would enable more to enter the workforce.

CMS' CLBP coverage decision is an example of evidence's impact on policy decisions. Increasing acupuncture's evidence base is critical to advancing the profession and obtaining payer recognition. The NCCAOM continues to work with the AAMA, ASA, and SAR to facilitate new acupuncture-specific research.

NCCAOM State-Medicaid Engagement Efforts

The NCCAOM Advocacy team continues to work closely with Mina, state lobbyists, and state advocates to support certification and state-based Medicaid initiatives to promote, and provide access to, acupuncture services as a non-opioid option. Mina continues to work with states to help develop programs and resources that would increase access to qualified acupuncture services.

Read more about the NCCAOM's advocacy efforts at the [NCCAOM Advocacy Page](#). Please contact the [NCCAOM Advocacy team](#) with any questions regarding the NCCAOM's Advocacy efforts and ways to get involved.