

NCCAOM Advocacy Update August 2019

By Molly Giammarco



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.

CMS Chronic Lower Back Pain Coverage Update

In February 2019, NCCAOM, in collaboration with the American Society of Acupuncturists (ASA), submitted comments to the [Current National Coverage Analysis for Acupuncture for Chronic Low Back Pain \(CLBP\)](#) that requested Medicare cover acupuncture for CLBP. The response included the current body of evidence supporting the efficacy of acupuncture for CLBP, additional acupuncture benefits, details on existing needs for further research, and improved study design around acupuncture trials, and recommendations on appropriate clinicians and training requirements.

In July, CMS released its Proposed Decision Memo CLBP that covers acupuncture services from **NCCAOM-certified acupuncturists** for Medicare beneficiaries involved in research projects to determine acupuncture's effect on individuals with chronic lower back pain (CLBP). The results of this research will help determine whether Medicare will cover acupuncture to treat CLBP for all Medicare beneficiaries.

As part of its national coverage determination analysis, CMS was seeking relevant clinical evidence to determine acupuncture's efficacy in treating CLBP for CMS beneficiaries until August 15, 2019. NCCAOM's Advocacy Workgroup also provided comments to CMS.

Voices for Non-Opioid Choices

In April 2019, NCCAOM became a member of the Voices for Non-Opioid Choices Coalition, which officially launched in May 2019 in Washington, D.C. The Coalition seeks

to prevent opioid addiction by increasing access to non-opioid therapies and approaches to managing acute pain. NCCAOM participated in the Coalition launch. Mina Larson, NCCAOM CEO-elect, attended a briefing at the National Press Club about the Coalition and its purpose, and Molly Giammarco, NCCAOM Manager, Government Relations, attended a dinner for Coalition members to meet and learn more about various opioid-mitigation efforts. A lunch briefing on Capitol Hill the next day was followed by a series of Congressional meetings to introduce the Coalition.



The NCCAOM participates in regular conference call meetings of the Coalition members. The meetings keep members engaged by sharing opportunities to sign and to individually draft, regulatory comments, support letters, op-ed articles, and other communications to further promote the Coalition and its members' goals to reduce opioid addiction. Read more about the Coalition here: <https://nonopioidchoices.org/about/>

Advocacy Luncheon Presentation

In May 2019, John Richardson provided an overview of NCCAOM's advocacy efforts during a lunch sponsored by American Acupuncture Council at the Council of Colleges of Oriental Medicine meeting that touched upon a recent advocacy effort, H.R. 6, which is a piece of current federal legislation pertaining to acupuncture coverage, as well as current and future federal and state advocacy opportunities.

NCCAOM State-Medicaid Engagement Efforts

In accordance with H.R. 6 requirements, the Center for Medicaid and CHIP Services (CMCS) released a "Medicaid Strategies for Non-Opioid Pharmacologic and Non-Pharmacologic Chronic Pain Management" Informational Bulletin in late February 2019. Over the past several months, NCCAOM's government relations staff engaged with CMCS and Senate leadership to develop an issue brief summarizing the acupuncture's pain-management role and highlighting the success state programs have in providing coverage for acupuncture treatment.

The NCCAOM advocacy efforts secured strong language supporting acupuncture, which has served as a launching pad for our further efforts to expand access in the states, as well as

bolster our case for eventual national coverage of acupuncture through the Medicare program.

Pain-Management Best Practices Inter-Agency Task Force Draft Report

In late 2018, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Pain Management Best Practices Inter-Agency Task Force released a draft report outlining preliminary recommendations for improving pain management. The report recommended prioritizing non-pharmacological, pain-management options for both chronic and acute pain, and it called for the federal government and private payers to encourage these treatments by reevaluating and redesigning payment systems. Additionally, the report recommended improving patient and provider education around pain-management and non-opioid avenues for treating pain.

The Task Force released a draft report with a 90-day public comment period. The NCCAOM Advocacy Taskforce responded by highlighting specific recommendations around reimbursement, workforce, research, and education in March 2019. The NCCAOM comment letter is available on the [website](#). NCCAOM GR staff also issued an action alert asking NCCAOM Diplomates to submit individual feedback on the draft report. The action alert included key points and draft language. The Task Force will likely finalize its final report in late 2019.

We will continue to update and add to the resources in the Advocacy Toolkit as we welcome feedback from our Diplomates on how we can best support your local advocacy efforts. Current additions under development include Advocacy 101 documents, updates on recent recommendations for pain management, and materials focused on state Medicaid program offerings.

Stop by the [NCCAOM Advocacy Page](#) to learn more about the NCCAOM's advocacy efforts for the profession and our certification. Please contact the [NCCAOM Advocacy team](#) with any questions regarding the NCCAOM's Advocacy efforts and ways to get involved.