



## NCCAOM Advocacy Update August 2020

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

### COVID-19 Response and Advocacy

The NCCAOM continues to monitor policy related to the pandemic and inform its Diplomates about COVID-19-related relief available to the profession. Monitored issues include the CARES Act, the Small Business Administration funding options: The Economic Injury Disaster Loan and Paycheck Protection Program, state and federal pandemic unemployment insurance, and state reopening guidance.

The NCCAOM continues to update its [COVID-19 Resource Page](#), which provides 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](#)
- [Paycheck Protection Program and Health Care Enhancement Act Summary](#)
- [Paycheck Protection Flexibility Act Summary](#)
- [Paycheck Protection Extension Act Summary](#)



Between April and June, the NCCAOM and the American Society for Acupuncturists hosted a town hall each week to keep acupuncturists informed about COVID-related small-business relief, telehealth options, legislative efforts, unemployment expansions, student resources, as well as what to expect in the near and long-term future for the profession and the U.S. response. We hope to provide additional collaborative town halls in the future, as needed.

### CMS Recognition – What it means for the Profession and Next Steps for Advocacy

The profession saw great progress in the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) recognizing acupuncture services for chronic lower back pain (cLBP) in early 2020. However, the profession's growth remains hindered by the lack of CMS recognition of Medicare providers.

Even with CMS' cLBP coverage decision, the lack of Medicare recognition for the profession prohibits acupuncturists from providing the service to Medicare beneficiaries unless supervised. This requirement severely restricts the number of acupuncturists who can provide services for cLBP to Medicare beneficiaries, as the acupuncturist service-delivery model does not require supervision.

This designation would enable acupuncturists to directly bill Medicare for services rendered to Medicare beneficiaries, expand access to acupuncturists, increase opportunities for student-loan forgiveness, and enable data collection to show acupuncture's effectiveness as a treatment and a wellness option.

Obtaining Medicare recognition requires a Congressional bill that would instruct CMS to add acupuncturists as a recognized provider. The NCCAOM continues to develop strategy for pursuing this recognition via federal legislation and continues to work with the ASA toward this goal.

Throughout June and July, the NCCAOM and the ASA devoted several town halls to provide information on Medicare recognition, the process for obtaining this recognition, and the potential roadblocks, challenges, and other considerations for becoming recognized Medicare providers.

The NCCAOM also created a resource document, the [Acupuncturists' Path toward Medicare Recognition](#), which provides an overview of Medicare recognition and its meaning for the profession. The resource is available on the NCCAOM advocacy page.



The pandemic prevents in-person Congressional meetings from taking place and Congress remains focused on developing pandemic-relief legislation. COVID-19 will likely dominate the Congressional calendar until the November elections and beyond. The pandemic will dictate the ability to launch an in-person advocacy strategy in 2021, but the profession can do a lot in the meantime to prepare its advocacy strategy. Stay tuned for more updates on next steps for obtaining Medicare recognition. Contact the NCCAOM Government Relations team with any Medicare-related questions: [advocacy@thenccaom.org](mailto:advocacy@thenccaom.org)

### Voices for Non-Opioid Choices Coalition and Advocacy

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 endorsed [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.

The NCCAOM continues to provide advocacy support to the Voices Coalition and the NO PAIN Act through messaging and Coalition virtual meetings. The pandemic has prevented in-person Congressional meetings, but the NCCAOM will continue to support the NO PAIN Act virtually and once Congress can begin holding in-person meetings.

Read more about the [Coalition](#).

### CDC Managing Acute and Chronic Pain Comments

In June, the NCCAOM collaborated with the ASA to respond to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) request for feedback on managing acute and chronic pain. The [NCCAOM/ASA comments](#) recommended that the CDC explore financial imbalances and the financial incentives that inhibit the conversation around, and the movement toward, viable non-pharmacologic pain-management options such as acupuncture. The comments included studies that demonstrate the value acupuncturist have in effectively managing acute and chronic pain, as well as promoted acupuncture as a safe and effective alternative to opioids.

### NIH NCCIH 2016-2021 Strategic Plan Comments

In July, the NCCAOM partnered with the ASA to provide input on the National Institute of Health's National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health's [\(NCCIH\) 2016-2021 Strategic Plan](#). The NCCAOM/ASA feedback focused on five strategic objectives:

1. Advance Fundamental Science and Methods Development



2. Improve Care for Hard-to-Manage Symptoms
3. Foster Health Promotion and Disease Prevention
4. Enhance the Complementary and Integrative Health Workforce
5. Disseminate Objective Evidence-Based Information on Complementary and Integrative Health Interventions.

The NCCAOM/ASA comments recommended initiating acupuncture-focused research to reduce existing literature gaps, focusing more on whole-person health, enhancing the NCCIH website to include education on complementary and integrative health options, facilitating interdisciplinary collaborations, including licensed acupuncturists in the NCCIH National Health Interview Survey, and enabling more messaging and education on evidence-based methods such as acupuncture.

There will be a continued effort to work with the NCCIH to ensure that the NCCIH short- and long-term strategy help increase awareness or, and access to, evidence-based acupuncture practices for both health and wellness.

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.