



Improving Access to Workers' Compensation for Injured Federal Workers Act

The American Association of Orthopaedic Surgeons (AAOS) is opposed to the *Improving Access to Workers' Compensation for Injured Federal Workers Act* (H.R. 618/S. 131). This legislation would permit nurse practitioners (NPs) and physician assistants (PAs) to diagnose, prescribe, treat, and certify an injury and extent of disability for purposes of compensating federal workers under the Federal Employees' Compensation Act.

The AAOS strongly supports physician-led, team-based care, where each member of the team possesses skills that are complementary but not interchangeable. Properly designed and efficiently run workers compensation programs are crucial for providing high-quality health care to injured workers. Because nearly one third of permanent workplace disabilities are musculoskeletal in nature, orthopaedic surgeons play a critical role in the workers' compensation system both at the state and federal level.

Why This Legislation Matters:

Current law prohibits non-physicians from diagnosing and treating workers compensation cases and instead reserves this role for physicians who have the education, training, and expertise to make these evaluations. While NPs and PAs play a critical role in our nation's health care system and are key members of the care team, a physician-led care team is crucial to diagnosing and treating these often complex cases. NPs and PAs vary greatly in their training and experience as it pertains to treating the musculoskeletal system. Some post-graduate NP degrees can be obtained online with minimal requirements for direct patient care. By contrast, orthopaedic surgeons complete four years of undergraduate education, four years of medical school, at least a five-year residency program, and in most cases, a one-year fellowship.

In addition, there is strong evidence that approaches like the *Improving Access to Workers' Compensation to Injured Federal Workers Act* can increase health care costs due to overprescribing and overutilization of diagnostic imaging, and studies have shown that NPs tend to prescribe more opioids than physicians. Lastly, there is little to no evidence that expanding scopes of practice for NPs and PAs will lead to improved access to care, particularly in rural areas.

AAOS Recommends:

Ensure patients receive the highest quality of care and oppose the *Improving Access to Workers' Compensation for Injured Federal Workers Act* (H.R. 618/S. 131).

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