

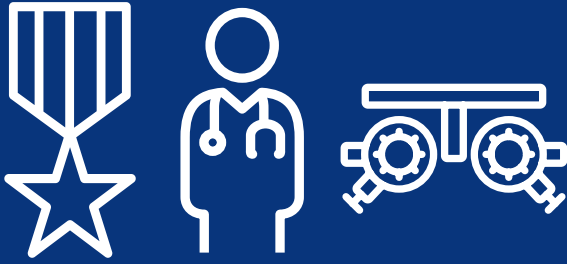


Veterans Deserve National Standards of Practice Guaranteeing Access to ALL Care That Their Optometrist is Trained and Licensed to Provide

Right now, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is developing new National Standards of Practice (NSP) for doctors of optometry and others. NSP are being created to help VA implement its new electronic health record system in conjunction with the Department of Defense.

The new standards are expected to be a list of services that Veterans may seek from VA optometrists. Which services the VA includes or excludes from NSP will have a significant impact on Veteran access to care. Leading Members of Congress are joining with Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs) to urge VA to ensure that Veterans have access to the full scope of services that doctors of optometry are able to provide under their respective state license.

With eye and vision care now the third-most requested service by Veterans, VA doctors of optometry have proven to be an essential provider of primary and medical eye care as well as visual rehabilitation services. VA doctors of optometry today care for nearly 70 percent of the total unique veteran visits involving eye care services annually, with more than 1.7 million unique and 3.1 million overall patient visits. Roughly 73 percent of the 2.5 million selected ophthalmic procedures and nearly 99 percent of services in low vision clinics and blind rehabilitation centers are provided by VA optometrists.



Nearly 1,000 VA optometrists are currently practicing at 95 percent of the VA sites where eye care is offered and are often the only licensed independent eye care practitioner at many VA facilities.

VA NSP that allow all care authorized under the state license of doctors of optometry would align VA with other federal programs and all major private health insurers. For decades, Medicare, Medicaid and the Indian Health Service have covered and ensured patient access to the wide range of medical eye care services and procedures doctors of optometry are trained and licensed to perform; from treating glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy, and other sight-threatening conditions to performing injections and therapeutic laser eye care. All major private payers cover and pay for this care as provided by optometrists operating within their state-authorized scope of practice. VA recently removed language limiting community care doctors of optometry from providing advanced procedures, including injections and lasers, replacing it with language asserting that the “services may be provided by an ophthalmologist or optometrist based on state licensure of the provider.” This language is critical to ensuring full access to these important eye care services for our veterans. VA doctors of optometry

should not be restricted in the care they can provide compared to those in the community.

Over the past 30 years, an increasing number of states have passed laws authorizing their state’s doctors of optometry to provide a wide range of needed medical eye care, including medical procedures such as injections, removal of foreign bodies, and therapeutic laser eye procedures. These states cite that this authority has led to an increase in access to care that patients need, particularly in their state’s underserved and rural areas. Oklahoma optometrists, for example, have been providing this care since 1988, with no reported complaints. In fact, malpractice rates for states with this authority are roughly identical to rates in states without, highlighting the safety and efficacy of this care provided by optometrists. That’s why leading Members of Congress representing every state with this authority and national VSOs are calling on VA to ensure that new VA practice standards guarantee that Veterans have access to the full range of care local doctors of optometry are trained and licensed to provide.



“AMVETS believes these new national practice standards must be inclusive of all health care services that its health care professionals are authorized to provide in any state. Anything short of fully comprehensive practice standards will unnecessarily limit Veteran access to care and negatively impact Veteran access and health outcomes.”



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