



Release: VA Grants Veterans Direct Access to Nurse Practitioners Nationwide

In a major victory for our nation's veterans, the Department of Veterans Affairs this week announced a rule change that will grant veterans direct access to nurse practitioners working in the VA system nationwide.

The new rule brings the VA more in line with modern nurse practitioner (NP) practice. It will enable NPs to serve veterans to a fuller extent of their education and training.

21 states and the District of Columbia which have already adopted modern licensure rules for nurse practitioners. The VA's new rule preempts licensure laws in states like Pennsylvania with outdated nurse practitioner rules.

"The people who serve our country in uniform deserve access to the highest quality health care our country can provide. We applaud the Veterans Health Administration for its decision to allow our veterans direct access to nurse practitioners," said Pennsylvania Coalition of Nurse Practitioners President Lorraine Bock.

Over 5,400 NPs work for the VA, making it the largest employer of NPs in the country. The rule change takes effect Jan. 13. Its entry in the Federal Register can be found [here](#).

"This is great news for all veterans who receive health care from the VA," said Sheila Gealey, a Butler County nurse practitioner who worked in the VA for over two decades. "However, many veterans seek health care outside the VA system. For them and all patients, it's urgent that Pennsylvania lawmakers modernize our state's nurse practitioner law."

In a [statement](#) announcing the change, the VA said: "This rulemaking increases veterans' access to VA health care by expanding the pool of qualified health care professionals who are authorized to provide primary health care and other related health care services to the full extent of their education, training, and certification, without the clinical supervision of physicians, and it permits VA to use its health care resources more effectively and in a manner that is consistent with the role of APRNs in the non-VA health care sector, while maintaining the patient-centered, safe, high-quality health care that veterans receive from VA."

The Pennsylvania Coalition of Nurse Practitioners supports legislation in Pennsylvania that would better align our state's nurse practitioner law with the new VA policy.

About Full Practice Authority for Nurse Practitioners

Nurse practitioners (NPs) are also called Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs) or Certified Registered Nurse Practitioners (CRNPs). They have graduate, advanced education, with master's degrees or doctorates and are nationally certified in their specialty areas. Among their many services, NPs order, perform and interpret diagnostic tests; diagnose and treat acute and chronic conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, infections and injuries; prescribe medications and other treatments; and manage a patient's care. Over 100 studies have proven that NPs provide safe, high-quality health care.

Currently, in order to practice, a nurse practitioner must secure business contracts called collaborative agreements with two physicians. Researchers – including physicians and nurse practitioners alike – have proven that this mandate offers no patient health benefits. To the contrary, research shows that the mandate restricts access to care and correlates with worse patient health outcomes.

Full practice authority legislation would end this costly, arbitrary and outdated mandate and make Pennsylvania a full practice authority state. Currently, 21 states and the District of Columbia are already using full practice authority to expand access to care, especially for underserved rural areas and patients with Medicaid insurance.

About the Pennsylvania Coalition of Nurse Practitioners

PCNP is the state organization that promotes and protects the practice of over 10,000 Certified Registered Nurse Practitioners (CRNPs) in Pennsylvania and whose mission is to improve access to care. Formed in the 1980s by three forward-thinking NPs, PCNP now has 18 regional groups across the Commonwealth.

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