



October 8, 2009

The Honorable Michael H. Michaud, Chairman
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs
Subcommittee on Health
338 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Henry E. Brown Jr., Ranking Member
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs
Subcommittee on Health
338 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

RE: Statement of the American Chiropractic Association in Support of H.R. 1017, the Chiropractic Care Available to All Veterans Act

Dear Chairman Michaud and Ranking Member Brown:

On behalf of the American Chiropractic Association (ACA), we thank you for providing an opportunity to submit a statement for the official subcommittee record on H.R. 1017, the Chiropractic Care Available to All Veterans Act.

ACA provides professional and educational opportunities for doctors of chiropractic (DCs), supports research regarding chiropractic and health issues, and offers leadership for the advancement of the profession. With approximately 15,000 members, ACA promotes the highest standards of ethics and patient care, contributing to the health and well-being of millions of chiropractic patients.

ACA wholeheartedly supports H.R. 1017 and believes it will assist millions of veterans in receiving quality care, especially for the treatment of musculoskeletal injuries and conditions. Painful and disabling joint and back disorders are the top health problems of veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, according to Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) statistics from earlier this year (“Analysis of VA Health Care Utilization Among U.S. Global War on Terrorism Veterans, Jan. 2009”).

In recent years, after decades of inaction and neglect, the VA finally began the long-overdue process of providing veterans access to chiropractic care by placing doctors of chiropractic on staff at VA hospitals. The process of integrating chiropractic care in the VA system was initiated after Congress enacted a series of statutes (P.L. 108-170 and P.L. 107-135) including specific directives to hire doctors of chiropractic and place them at VA health care facilities.

Although a chiropractic benefit has theoretically been available within the VA system for many years, Congress took action when it became apparent that VA had failed to take any reasonable steps to provide veterans with chiropractic care. As a result of the congressional directives cited earlier, as well as recommendations issued by a congressionally mandated advisory committee, the VA currently provides chiropractic care (via hired or contracted staff) at 32 major VA treatment facilities within the United States.

In VA facilities where they are available, chiropractic services have become an integrated and appreciated part of patient treatment. Doctors of chiropractic in the VA are treated as peers and colleagues, and are regarded as a valuable source of information in the care of VA patients.

By all accounts, the treatment provided by DCs in the VA is regarded as a highly effective, cost-efficient course of treatment with positive outcomes and a high level of patient satisfaction. Additionally, doctors of chiropractic in the VA bring new ideas and viewpoints to patient-centered care, clinical research and education. These new perspectives help strengthen the VA by fostering innovative approaches and strategies.

Numerous veterans' service organizations agree that chiropractic care is an essential component of the VA health care system. Among those that support the inclusion of chiropractic in the VA are the Vietnam Veterans of America, the American Legion, the Paralyzed Veterans of America and the Veterans of Foreign Wars, which stated, "We believe this legislation to be of great importance in consideration of the various injuries veterans have received and the known benefits for chiropractic care."

Despite this progress, the overwhelming majority of America's eligible veterans continue to be denied access to chiropractic care because the VA has failed to take steps to provide chiropractic care at approximately 120 additional VA treatment facilities—comprising the major sites where VA care is offered. Detroit, Denver, and Chicago are just a few examples of major metropolitan areas still lacking a doctor of chiropractic at the local VA medical facility.

Shockingly, this disparity continues despite important data demonstrating a critical need within the VA for the specific and specialized type of health care services that doctors of chiropractic provide. ACA believes that integrating chiropractic treatment into the VA health care system would not only be cost-effective, it would also speed the recovery of many of the veterans returning from current operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

As mentioned earlier, a January 2009 VA report indicates that more than 49 percent of veterans returning from the Middle East and Southwest Asia who have sought VA health care were treated for symptoms associated with musculoskeletal ailments—the top complaint of those tracked for the report.

These patients commonly suffer musculoskeletal injuries from combat due to heavy gear and body armor, motor vehicle accidents, and of course blast injuries or polytrauma. Clearly, the need for expanded access to services delivered by doctors of chiropractic has never been more crucial.

To correct this disparity, Congressman Bob Filner, Chairman of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs, introduced H.R. 1017, the Chiropractic Care Available to All Veterans Act, which aims to expand the number of chiropractic physicians at major VA medical centers. Without a congressional directive, further expansion to VA facilities will happen on a case-by-case basis and more than likely will be excruciatingly slow.

H.R. 1017 will codify chiropractic as a covered service throughout the VA health care system, requiring the VA to have a doctor of chiropractic on staff at all VA medical facilities by 2012. It also amends the current statute, the Department of Veterans Affairs Health Care Programs Enhancement Act of 2001, ensuring that chiropractic benefits cannot be denied.

Veterans want, need and deserve access to chiropractic care, and our goal should be to ensure that chiropractic is available and accessible at every major VA health care facility. The chiropractic profession welcomes the opportunity to serve our nation's veterans. It is an honor to give back to those who have given so much for us.

Passage of the Chiropractic Care Available to All Veterans Act will ensure that our veterans receive the highest level of care possible in some of the world's finest medical settings. The American Chiropractic Association urges Congress to pass this legislation immediately.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rick A. McMichael". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, prominent "R" and "M".

Rick A. McMichael, DC
President