
Jewish War Veterans of the USA

Statement for the Record

***“VA’s Federal Supremacy Initiative: Putting
Veterans First?”***

**Before the House Veterans Affairs Committee
Subcommittee on Health**

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Presented by

**Ken Greenberg
National Executive Director**

Chairwoman Miller-Meeks, Ranking Member Brownley, members of the Health Subcommittee and full Committee on Veterans Affairs, thank you for holding this important hearing on the Department of Veterans Affairs National Standards of Practice (NSP). We commend the Committee for focusing on *VA's Federal Supremacy Initiative: Putting Veterans First?*

National Standards of Practice

JWV as an organization supports the concept of national standards of care that protect our nation's veterans and ensure that they have access to high-quality care. VA is applauded for creating more than 50 standards for clinical specialties. The standards mean that health care professionals in a specific occupation can perform within VA, regardless of their state registration, certification, or licensure.

Why is this important? While some clinical specialties have uniform requirements across the states, others have scopes of practice that vary widely from state to state. These differences will affect the patient care veterans receive. That said, JWV has strong concerns about VA's national standards of practice for health professionals within the VA system that could lower the standard of care available to veterans. Let's look at one example highlighted below.

NSP for Eye Care Health Care Professionals

As an example, JWV is concerned about the future of veterans' surgical eye care as in September 2022, VA modified its Community Care "Standardized Episode of Care (SEOC): Eye Care Comprehensive" guideline by removing language that provided that "only ophthalmologists can perform invasive procedures, including injections, lasers, and eye surgery." By removing this sentence, VA is implicitly authorizing optometrists to perform ophthalmic surgery on veterans they refer to the Community Care program in the few states where it is permitted by state licensure laws.

JWV's concern begins with VA removing this language without any opportunity for public or the veteran community to comment. We are extremely concerned that this important patient safeguard was removed and poses an increased risk to veterans requiring surgical eye care. Veterans have benefitted from established, consistent, high-quality surgical eye care for decades because VA maintained a long-standing policy that restricts the performance of therapeutic laser eye surgery to ophthalmologists and medical or osteopathic doctors who specialize in eye and vision care in VA medical facilities.

This policy is consistent with the standard of medical care in most states. It also ensures that there is a system-wide quality standard for surgical eye care and that all veterans have access to the eye care provider with the appropriate education, training and professional experience needed to perform their eye surgery.

JWV remains concerned that VA wants to adopt a national standard of practice that could allow optometrists to perform surgery on the eyes of veterans, even though optometrists do not have the necessary level of medical education or surgical training to be a surgeon. While JWV acknowledges that optometrists play a very critical role in delivering quality eye health care for our nation's veterans, we strongly believe that optometrists should not be allowed to perform eye surgery on veterans because they do not have the requisite training or medical degree to do so.

JWV urges VA to immediately reinstate the language back into the SEOC: "only ophthalmologists can perform invasive procedures, including injections, lasers, and eye surgery." JWV remains ready to work with VA as well as HVAC officials as VA seeks to establish national standards of practice roles for optometry and ophthalmology within the VA health system.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement for the record. Please do not hesitate to contact JWV on this specific NSP on eye care or any other proposed NSP.



Jewish War Veterans

of the United States of America

Founded in 1896

1811 R Street, NW
Washington, DC 20009

Email: jwv@jwv.org

(202) 265-6280

www.jwv.org

***JWV is A Jewish Voice for Veterans and
a Veteran's Voice for Jews***