



**THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON**

October 8, 2021

Dear American Medical Association and Physician Organizations:

Thank you for your July 28, 2021, co-signed letter to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) addressing the development of national standards of practice for VA health care professionals.

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) is developing national standards to ensure safe, high-quality care for the Nation's Veterans in VA's integrated health care system and to ensure that VA health care professionals can meet the needs of Veterans when practicing within the scope of their VA employment. National standards are designed to increase Veterans' access to health care, thereby improving health outcomes for our Nation's Veterans.

As the Nation's largest integrated health care system, VA believes it is critical to develop national standards of practice that ensure Veterans receive the same high-quality care regardless of where they enter the system. The importance of this initiative has been underscored by the COVID-19 pandemic. With an increased need for mobility in our workforce, including through VA's Disaster Emergency Medical Personnel System (DEMPS), creating a uniform standard of practice better supports VA health care professionals who already practice across State lines. In addition, the development of national standards of practice aligns with VA's long-term deployment of a new electronic health record (EHR). National standards of practice are critical for optimal EHR implementation to enable the specific roles for each health care profession in EHR to be consistent across VHA and to support increased interoperability between VA and the Department of Defense (DoD).

Throughout the development process, VA has had continued engagement with external stakeholders. VA has also provided quarterly informational briefings to Congress, beginning in November 2020. Similarly, VA has provided briefings to Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) beginning in November 2020. VA will continue to brief Congress, VSOs, and other external stakeholders as needed.

With this in mind, we would like to emphasize that in most cases, VA will be adopting standards that are consistent with current State requirements and will only deviate to the extent necessary to effectively furnish health care services to Veterans. VA is committed to ensuring that State Boards are engaged in the process to develop national standards of practice. VA will send every State Board a letter with information on the impact of the proposed national standard of practice on the specific State, with an opportunity for the State Board to respond. In addition, every draft national standard will be published in the Federal Register for public comment.

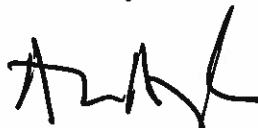
When VA has a need to deviate from a State requirement to effectively furnish health care services to Veterans, we will continue to require adherence to VA's qualification standards, local privileges, scopes of practice, and functional statements that ensure competent, safe, and appropriate care for Veterans. Privileges, scopes of practice, and functional statements will continue to be specific to individuals based upon their education, training, experience, skill, and clinical assignment.

Although this comprehensive initiative is new, the concept of Federal standards of practice is not. DoD has historically standardized practice for certain health care professionals, and VHA is closely partnered with DoD to learn from their experience. In addition, VA already has a longstanding practice of authorizing VA health care professionals to practice health care consistent with their Federal duties to meet the needs of Veterans and consistently and reliably deliver high quality health care. In 2017, VHA established national standards for three classes of Advanced Practice Registered Nurses; and in 2018, VHA established "anywhere to anywhere" care through telehealth, allowing health care providers to provide telehealth services from anywhere in the country to a beneficiary in any location. This has allowed physicians and other health care professionals to deliver high quality care to Veterans across the Nation. In undertaking this new endeavor, we emphasize that the development of national standards within VA will not change the way most VA health care professionals practice health care, and it does not allow for the performance of a task or duty that is beyond the professional's education, training, experience, and skill.

We are grateful for your thoughtful views on this project and have already incorporated some of your feedback into our development strategy. We also recognize that you may not have had complete information about this initiative, and we offer an enclosure that provides additional information in response to your feedback.

This response has also been provided to the other signatories of your letter. Thank you for your support of our Nation's Veterans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "DMcDonough", written in a cursive style.

Denis McDonough

Enclosure