

Acupuncture for Heroes and Seniors Act: Section-by-Section Summary

Rep. Judy Chu

October 2015

Section 1. Short Title; Table Of Contents.

Short Title: Acupuncture for Heroes and Seniors Act of 2015.

Section 2. Definitions.

The term “qualified acupuncturist services” means acupuncturist services that are furnished by a qualified acupuncturist and which the qualified acupuncturist is legally authorized to perform under State law.

A “qualified acupuncturist” means an individual who is licensed as an acupuncturist by a State, the District of Columbia, or the territories. In the case of an individual in a State that does not provide for such licensure or certification, the individual may meet such criteria (such as accreditation through an appropriate nationally recognized certification authority for acupuncturists) as the Secretary of Health and Human Services may specify. In specifying such requirements, the Secretary may use the same requirements as those established by such a certification authority. (This alternative to state licensing is consistent throughout the bill for each agency or military branch covered.)

Section 3. Inclusion Of Acupuncture Services Through Military Health Care System And Tricare Program.

Permits members of the uniformed services entitled to medical care under the Military Health Care System and Tricare to access qualified acupuncturist services (without the requirement of a referral) provided in a military medical treatment facility or a private facility by an acupuncturist who is licensed in the State in which the facility is located.

Section 4. Acupuncture Health Services For Tricare Program Beneficiaries.

Requires the Secretary of Defense to develop a plan to carry out the provisions of Section 3 above. The plan would have to require that contracts entered into for health care services must clearly describe the process that a covered beneficiary must use to select and have direct access to a qualified acupuncturist. The plan would have to be submitted to Congress for review.

Section 5. Appointment Of Acupuncturists As Commissioned Officers In The Armed Forces.

Provides that acupuncturists who are qualified under regulations prescribed by the Secretaries of the Army or Navy may be appointed as commissioned officers in the Acupuncture Section of the Medical Service Corps of those two branches of the military.

Further provides that acupuncturist functions in the Air Force shall be performed by commissioned officers of the Air Force who are qualified under regulations prescribed by the Secretary and who are designated as acupuncturist services officers.

Section 6. Inclusion Of Acupuncturist Services At Veterans Health Facilities.

Calls on the Secretary of Veteran's Affairs to provide acupuncture services to veterans. The program shall be carried out at in at least one facility of the Department in each Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN). In selecting such facilities, the Secretary shall ensure that the program is carried out in both urban and rural areas. Further requires the Secretary to ensure that the acupuncturist services available are able to address at least 13 medical conditions, including substance abuse and certain mental and physical health conditions.

The acupuncture services are to be offered through (a) qualified acupuncturists appointed as employees of the Department; and (b) through contract qualified acupuncturists if the Secretary is unable to make the appointments described in (a), or the patient requires specialty care that an employee is not able to provide to the patient, or there is an emergency that requires the use of such a contract acupuncturist.

Further, the Secretary shall provide training and materials to health care providers of the Department who provide primary care to veterans to explain the benefits of acupuncturist services.

Finally, establishes an advisory committee that would provide the Secretary with assistance and advice in the development and implementation of the program. Also prescribes the makeup and duties of the Committee to ensure that both acupuncture experts and veterans are members.

Ensures that acupuncturists are paid against the same scale as physicians.

Section 7. Coverage For Acupuncturist Services Under The Medicare Program.

Ensures that qualified acupuncturist services are covered by Medicare and that acupuncturists are paid against the physicians fee schedule. This section also provides for different billing methods depending on where the acupuncturist services are rendered.

Under this section, qualified acupuncturists will qualify for the "opt-out" under Medicare.

Section 8. Acupuncturists In The Regular Corps And The Ready Reserve Corps Of The Public Health Service.

Makes qualified acupuncturists eligible for appointment as officers in the commissioned Regular Corps and the Ready Reserve Corps of the Public Health Service. Requires the Secretary of Health and Human Services to appoint no fewer than six acupuncturists into the commissioned Regular Corps and the Ready Reserve Corps of the Public Health Service.