

Supporting Expanded Access to Audiologists Policy Position Statement 2024

The American Academy of Audiology identifies audiologists as independent practitioners who provide comprehensive hearing and balance healthcare services to which consumers should have full access in the most efficient way possible. To that end, we recognize the need to modernize outdated statutes and regulations that stymie the practice of audiology and its evolution to meet the needs of the patients we serve. Efforts at the federal and state levels to remove barriers and expand access are critical to advancing the Academy's strategic priority of supporting audiologists - our members - to practice at the top of their license.

The Academy's *Scope of Practice* document (2023) defines audiologists as "point-of-entry health-care providers for persons with auditory and vestibular disorders." This document delineates activities that are within the expertise of audiologists yet also states that the scope of practice of the audiologist is "complex, dynamic, and constantly evolving." The Academy does not intend for the *Scope of Practice* document to inhibit innovation and expansion of the audiologist's role to meet the needs of the communities we serve. The proscription in the *Scope of Practice* is that Academy members "provide only those services that they are competent and licensed to perform based on their education, training, and experience" and to practice in accordance with the Academy's *Code of Ethics*.

The Academy is in favor of states' pursuit of avenues to expand access to audiological care. We support audiologists' prerogative to practice to the full extent possible and in keeping with their level of educational preparation. As states consider changes in statutes and regulations, consideration should be given to crafting language that allows the most flexibility and opportunity to grow the audiologist's role. Narrowly defined practice acts necessitate changes as the profession evolves, and the processes involved in amending practice acts can be time-consuming and introduce risks.

The Academy generally engages in state-level advocacy when (a) requested by state associations or Academy members in the state, and/or (b) when state legislation or regulations pose a threat to audiology practice. The Academy invites any state audiology organization to reach out to the Academy, as well as the other national professional audiology organizations, at the beginning of the process of drafting legislation, particularly as it relates to codifying expanded services provided by audiologists. We encourage state and other organizations to make official requests articulating needs and allowing sufficient time to respond. We recognize that multiple organizations may have diverse perspectives, but open and transparent communications at the front end can improve a cohesive understanding of legislative objectives and potential challenges.

The Academy is well positioned to assess whether local legislative proposals conflict or have messaging that conflicts with other legislative priorities in the state and federal arenas. When conflicts arise, the Academy can help manage relationships with relevant stakeholders to facilitate achievable legislative priorities. The Academy will also:

- Carefully assess the potential benefits (improved access, improved quality of care, reimbursement potential, etc.) against potential costs (increased legal liability, payment failure, reputation loss when individual practitioners fail to meet expected standards of care, etc.) and communicate these to local proponents.
- Promote standards for audiology curriculum and continuing education offerings that align with the local legal scope of practice.
- Assess whether any other steps are needed to ensure new legislation protects the health, safety, and welfare of our patients and the communities we serve.
- Support audiologists performing to their full scope of practice and licensure, and help the profession understand potential outcomes of proposed bills that would expand practice acts. Fully comprehending any proposed legislation's potential beneficial and adverse effects on the practice of audiology is paramount, and the Academy aims to offer transparency and a comprehensive perspective to understanding potential unforeseen consequences.

As changes to state licensure acts impact individual audiologists, as well as state and national organizations, the Academy would like to underscore the following:

- Coordination with the Academy and other stakeholders early in the process of initiating or reacting to new legislation for expanded access is essential. Open and transparent stakeholder communications at the front end can improve a cohesive understanding of legislative objectives, potential challenges, and ultimate success in achieving legislative priorities. It also facilitates the refinement of the existing educational infrastructure to meet any resulting service expectations from the individual audiologist or the profession.
- State licensure and the Academy's *Scope of Practice* and *Code of Ethics* should always guide the individual practitioner's clinical practice. This means that audiologists should only provide services they are competent and licensed to perform based on their education, training, and experience.

Approved by the Academy Board of Directors.

Released November 6, 2024.