



**American Orthotic &
Prosthetic Association**

Wounded Warrior Workforce Enhancement Act: Orthotic and Prosthetic Education

Background

The medical conditions (traumatic brain injury, amputation, stroke, etc.) of an increasing Veteran population, and an aging civilian population, have become more complex; and the emerging technologies/devices available to treat these conditions and improve the quality of life of these groups are becoming more sophisticated, and require specialized training (currently orthotists and prosthetists must obtain at a minimum a master's degree from an O&P accredited academic institution and complete a residency program) to gain the experience needed to fit and maintain the devices.

The National Commission on Orthotics and Prosthetics Education (NCOPE) commissioned a study of the O&P field, which was completed in May of 2015. The study found that in 2014, there were 6,675 licensed and/or certified orthotists and prosthetists in the United States. It concluded that, by 2025, "overall supply of credentialed O&P providers would need to increase by about 60 percent to meet the growing demand." Subsequent analysis conducted by NCOPE and the American Orthotic and Prosthetic Association (AOPA) suggests that the current number of providers is closer to 5,500.

Despite the demand for trained professionals, orthotic and prosthetic programs are not high enough profile and don't generate enough money for universities for them to underwrite sufficient numbers of programs; currently there are only thirteen schools in the US that offer master's degrees in orthotics and prosthetics. With a significant percentage of our nation's trained and experienced orthotic and prosthetic clinicians eligible to retire in the next ten years, current O&P accredited academic institutions cannot graduate enough qualified providers to maintain the current workforce, much less the number of clinicians that will be needed to care for the aging population and Veterans with increasing health needs. Nation-wide fewer than 250 students are anticipated to graduate with master's degrees in orthotics or prosthetics this year. There is a need to create grants to help universities establish master's degree programs in orthotics and prosthetics, or to expand upon existing institutions' master's programs to ensure care for our Veterans and aging civilian population.

Recommendation

We would like to work with Congress to secure funding for short-term competitive grants to universities to launch, or expand, the programs which focus on ensuring that future orthotic and prosthetic professionals will have the knowledge and skill base to keep up with the demands of an increasing Veteran population, and an aging civilian population.

We ask that you authorize \$15 million (\$5 million per year for three years to provide one-time competitive grants of \$1-1.5 million) to qualified universities to create or expand accredited advanced education programs in prosthetics and orthotics. Priority will be given to programs that have a partnership with Veterans' or Department of Defense facilities, including opportunities for clinical training, to ensure that students become familiar with and can respond to the unique needs of service members and Veterans; as well as seniors, and others with limb loss or limb impairments.

This limited, cost-effective approach to assisting universities in creating or expanding accredited master's degree programs in orthotics and prosthetics, will be repaid through more effective treatment of patients in the VA, Medicare and Medicaid, resulting in fewer co-morbidities and lower costs.

***For more information contact the American Orthotic & Prosthetic Association (AOPA)
at (866)443-0998 or Catriona Macdonald, Policy Advisor at
CMacdonald@LinchpinStrategies.com,***