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**American Orthotic &  
Prosthetic Association**

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## **Orthotic and Prosthetic Education**

### **Background**

Traumatic brain injury and amputation have become “signature injuries” in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Increasing numbers of Veterans, young and old, require high quality orthotic and prosthetic care to restore the maximum possible function, independence, and quality of life.

As our population ages, and rates of diabetes and cardiovascular disease increase, more and more Americans – Veterans and civilians – require the services of highly skilled prosthetists and orthotists. New technologies are improving the quality of life for patients following traumatic brain injury, amputation, and stroke. From the battlefield to the aging Veteran population at home, these medical conditions have become more complex and more challenging to treat. The technologies available to address them are more sophisticated, and require more training and experience to fit and maintain.

Recently, the entry level qualifications for prosthetists were changed to require master's degrees - at the same time that many experienced professionals in the field are themselves getting ready to retire. Providing high quality services to our Wounded Warriors, Veterans, seniors, and civilian amputees is going to require more master's degree programs at American universities to prepare the next generation of practitioners.

However, despite the demand for trained clinicians, O&P programs are not high enough profile and don't generate enough money for universities for them to underwrite sufficient numbers of programs. With a significant percentage of our nation's trained and experienced orthotic and prosthetic clinicians eligible to retire in the next ten years, current orthotics and prosthetics master's degree programs cannot currently graduate enough providers with master's degrees even to maintain the current prosthetic and orthotic workforce, much less the number of clinicians that will be needed to care for young Veterans of the current wars and an aging population of seniors with increasing health needs.

**(over)**

## **Recommendation**

We would like to work with Congress to secure funding for short-term competitive grants to universities to launch the programs that will be needed to train and prepare American practitioners to take care of patients. The relatively small investment needed on the part of the federal government will be repaid through more effective treatment of patients in the VA, Medicare and Medicaid, resulting in fewer co-morbidities and lower costs. Senator Durbin is now preparing to re-introduce the Wounded Warrior Workforce Enhancement Act. This bill authorizes \$15 million over three years in competitive grants that will help to assure that American universities can deliver sufficient numbers of well-trained orthotics and prosthetics professionals to keep pace with the needs of our military Veterans, seniors, and others with limb loss or limb impairments. AOPA urges Senators to join as co-sponsors of this bill, and hopes that members of the House will consider taking the lead in introduction of a companion bill.

***For more information contact the American Orthotic & Prosthetic Association (AOPA)  
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