

Scope of Study

Scope of Practice Determination for Health Care Professions

In health care, laws defining scope of practice¹ establish the legal framework that controls the delivery of medically-related services. State legislatures generally create the legal guidelines that govern health care professions, and such laws can vary by state. In Connecticut, the legislature has the overall authority in determining practice guidelines for health care professions.

Earlier in 2009, the public health committee submitted a request to the program review committee to study the topic of scope of practice for health care professions, including examining the processes used by other states. Concern has also been raised about whether Connecticut's process is the most appropriate one to establish and amend scopes of practice for health care professions. The process often entails technical medical nuances that require expertise that policymakers might not possess. Also, any contention among various health care professions regarding scope of practice policies forces the legislature to become the final arbiter to resolve such issues.

AREA OF FOCUS

The study will focus on Connecticut's process for developing and amending scopes of practice for health care professions and for reconciling differences when scope of practice issues arise among health care professions. The study will determine whether changes to the process are needed to make it more practical and efficient for policymakers, health care professionals, state regulatory entities, and consumers.

AREAS OF ANALYSIS

1. Identify the health care professions currently governed by legislatively-defined scopes of practice.
2. Describe the state's process to develop and amend scopes of practice for health care professions and summarize any major changes to the process occurring over time.
3. Identify the state's regulatory entities responsible for overseeing the health care professions governed by scopes of practice and determine their function within the scope of practice development process.

¹ Scope of practice is a term used to define the procedures, actions, and processes that are legally permitted for licensed professions. The scope of practice for a particular profession typically is based on specific education credentials, experience, and demonstrated competency. Individual states have laws, regulations, and licensing bodies that define scopes of practice, describe the requirements for education and training of a specific profession, and provide oversight of licensees.

4. Determine the roles of nongovernmental entities (e.g., professional associations and health care insurers) in the scope of practice development process and their impact on the process.
5. Examine whether Connecticut's scope of practice process improves consumers' access to health care services provided by competent health professionals.
6. Describe the models used by other states to develop scopes of practice for health professions (e.g., independent committees of experts used to provide advice to policymakers and input into the legislative deliberation process).
7. Review whether any other states are currently modifying their scope of practice development processes and the reasons for such modifications.
8. Evaluate whether a different model, or changes to the current model, for developing and amending scopes of practice for health professions in Connecticut would enhance the process.
9. Assess the potential impact of a new or revised scope of practice process on the organization, resources, and coordination of the state's regulatory entities responsible for overseeing health care professions.

AREA NOT INCLUDED IN SCOPE

This study will not evaluate the content of the laws, regulations, or policies governing scopes of practice for health care professions. The study also will not evaluate the state's enforcement efforts toward health care providers not practicing in accordance with their respective scopes of practice.