

**PROTECTING ACCESS TO PHYSICIAN SERVICES AND THE PRACTICE OF MEDICINE**

**The Problem:**

- Non-physicians regularly turn to the General Assembly to expand their “scope of practice.” In the last few years, for example, podiatrists have sought to become “podiatric physicians,” naturopaths have sought to prescribe prescription drugs, and pharmacists continually seek to provide medical care and counseling and to prescribe more and more medications. In 2024, we again expect physician assistants to propose changes to their statute. Often, non-physician groups are using the argument that their enhanced scope of practice is necessary to provide patients with increased “access” to care.
- Access to care is important, but increasing the *quantity* of providers should not be considered a substitute for ensuring *quality* of care. Physicians are the most educated and highly trained medical professionals because in addition to 4 years of medical school, they complete a medical residency not required of any other profession. Residency is a period of intense training lasting between 3 and 7 years, depending on the specialty.

**Solution:**

- Attempts by non-physician groups to secure physician privileges by way of legislation should be resisted. When there is a reasonable argument that increased “access” is necessary, the role of non-physicians should be enhanced only when they are supervised by or in collaboration with a physician who is trained in the particular medical area.
- There should also be a focus on the severe physician shortage in the U.S. The Commission to Study the Healthcare Workforce Crisis in Maryland was established in 2022 by the General Assembly to examine shortages across the industry, and MedChi is using this forum to educate policymakers about the need for more physicians as a solution to the problem, not expanding the scope of non-physicians. MedChi has also worked to achieve record funding for the Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment Program for Physicians as an incentive for physicians, who often face hundreds of thousands of dollars in medical school debt, to practice in underserved areas of our State.

**What to do:**

- Call/e-mail your legislator(s) and members of the Senate Finance Committee and the House Health and Government Operations Committee and ask them to look unfavorably on “scope of practice” expansions by non-physicians and to question the proponents as to why they should be exempt from the normal educational requirements required of physicians.
- To email your district legislator(s), go to [Members - Find My Representatives \(maryland.gov\)](https://www.maryland.gov/members).
- For contact information for members of the Senate Finance Committee and the House Health and Government Operations Committee, contact Chip O’Neil at [coneil@medchi.org](mailto:coneil@medchi.org).