

ACOEM'S AGENDA FOR CHANGE

10 practical action steps that can help move workplace-centered national health reform forward

1. *Establish a national culture of health in the workplace and ensure that every worker in the United States has access to occupational health care*

The amount of time Americans spend in the workplace has increased in recent decades. Because research shows a strong link between the health of our national workforce and its productivity, we should place a greater priority on creating healthy workplaces. Fostering a new “culture of health” in the work-place requires initiatives that ensure more workers have access to quality occupational health care.

2. *Increase awareness and utilization of work-disability management programs as a fundamental part of the nation's health improvement strategies.*

While much of our national discussion often centers on the needs of workers who are severely disabled, the reality is that vast numbers of Americans of working age have disabilities – the majority of them musculo-skeletal in nature – that can be effectively managed in a way that leads to recovery of at least some level of function and productivity.

3. *Promote workplace initiatives that help strengthen and improve the national public health and public safety infrastructure*

Significant public health/public safety threats impact the workplace. OEM physicians can play an important role in protecting public health/public safety through preventive services for workers.

4. *Improve the quality, cost, and consistency of the nation's workers' compensation systems*

The nation's workers' compensation programs vary widely in cost and effectiveness. The U.S. can improve its workers' compensation programs by recognizing and incentivizing the participation of high-quality physicians within the system, and by utilizing evidence-based health strategies.

5. *Reduce health disparities in the workplace*

The U.S. workforce has become increasingly diverse. Research indicates that with this diversity comes disparities in rates of disease, disability, and death – particularly among minorities, those with lower incomes. It is critical that these disparities be addressed to ensure a healthy and productive workforce.

6. *Create stronger protections for workers through enhanced rulemaking & recordkeeping policies*

ACOEM believes that the rulemaking and recordkeeping process used by agencies such as OSHA play a critical role in ensuring the health and safety of the nation's workforce. Long-term enhancements and improvements to rulemaking and recordkeeping should be considered.

7. *Promote federal funding for OEM training/residency programs*

Workforce health is critical to our nation's future. OEM physicians, trained in the development and delivery of workplace health initiatives, can help address this need. But there aren't enough OEM specialists to meet the need in the workplace. Federal policy should be strengthened to promote training programs, including residency training for future OEM physicians.

8. *Include workplace health initiatives as a fundamental component of federal health policy*

The U.S. health crisis has the potential to seriously weaken national productivity and economic stability. Addressing these issues should be a national priority. Workplace health measures should be formally included in federal policy – thus encouraging a system in which workplace health is integrated with our overall national health improvement efforts.

9. *Raise awareness and response to environmental health risks in workplaces, homes, and communities*

OEM physicians can recommend, interpret, and explain the results of environmental monitoring; identify sources and routes of environmental exposure; and recommend methods of reducing environmental health risks.

10. *Strengthen the practice environment for OEM physicians to ensure they are able to provide the full extent of their expertise to benefit the health of workers, their dependents, and retirees*

OEM physicians play an increasingly visible role in preventing diseases and promoting wellness. But in order to continue to offer these vital services, the specialty must be strong and viable, operating in an environment that supports and sustains it. This requires policies that reduce obstacles to patient care.