



## Health Policy Agenda 118th Congress

### Second Session

#### Patient Access to Quality Cancer Care

The pace of innovation in oncology treatment is rapidly increasing, with rising numbers of novel active substances and faster speeds to launch. ONS is working to ensure nurses are quickly and proactively prepared to care for patients using these emerging treatments and calls on the U.S. Congress and the administration to improve access to cancer screening, safe and affordable cancer drugs, radiotherapy, and surgery through:

- Accelerating the development of innovative cancer care delivery and payment models that improve access to and the provision of cancer care and treatment, including comprehensive, culturally appropriate patient navigation services.
- Passing the *Cancer Drug Parity Act*, which would provide reimbursement parity for oral cancer drugs.
- Enacting the *Improving Seniors' Timely Access to Care Act* and *Safe Step Act*, which would reduce the burdens of prior authorization and place reasonable limits on insurer use of step therapy and nonmedical switching.
- Funding the development of appropriate, risk-adjusted quality and resource use measures for cancer care and delivery and support for mechanisms to report key quality and resource use data to federal agencies.
- Incentivizing the development of drugs, including biologics, to treat pediatric cancers.
- Eliminating the disparity in preventable cancer deaths among underserved populations facing barriers to cancer prevention, detection, treatment, and survivorship care, including the passage of the *Comprehensive Cancer Survivorship Act* and the *SCREENS for Cancer Act* which reauthorizes the National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program.

## **Cancer Prevention**

Oncology nurses play an integral role in disseminating public health education and disease prevention. ONS will work to encourage the U.S. Congress and the administration to:

- Increase federal funding for screening, education, early detection, and prevention programs through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, including tobacco and e-cigarette or electronic nicotine delivery systems prevention and control efforts, including providing the Food and Drug Administration with increased authority to regulate tobacco, e-cigarette and electronic nicotine delivery system products, including the use of menthol and other flavorings.
- Ensure barrier-free insurance coverage to increase the availability and use of treatment services for smoking cessation, as outlined in the U.S. Surgeon General’s smoking cessation report.
- Address the role of social determinants of health in access to advancements in cancer prevention and early detection services.

## **Research**

ONS advocates for transformative research to advance cancer prevention, diagnosis, and treatment and to achieve the goals of the National Cancer Moonshot Initiative and encourages the U.S. Congress and the administration to:

- Support national initiatives (such as the Cancer Moonshot) using precision oncology and genomics to revolutionize the continuum of cancer prevention, early detection, treatment, and supportive care.
- Address the outcome disparities that disproportionately affect minority populations, including risk factors such as provider biases, poor provider-patient communication, lower levels of health literacy, and inconsistent implementation of culturally and linguistically appropriate services.
- Sustain funding for health disparity education and awareness programs at the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, including those that address health disparities in cancer prevention, diagnosis, and treatment.
  - Facilitate innovative approaches to developing cancer treatments that take into account individual differences in genetics, environments, and lifestyles and support comparative effectiveness research.
  - Promote patient awareness of clinical trials, ClinicalTrials.gov, and other clinical trial enrollment resources.
  - Support efforts to increase access to clinical trials among populations—including LGBTQ+ and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color communities—that are typically underrepresented in current clinical trial enrollment and ensure coverage of routine costs associated with participation in clinical trials.
- Increase federal funding for research at the National Institutes of Health, National Cancer Institute, and National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities.
  - Authorize and appropriate new funding to support oncology nurse scientists and sustain and expand quality-of-life, palliative care, and symptom management research.

- Increase federal funding that reflects the National Institute of Nursing Research’s (NINR’s) 2022– 2026 strategic plan priorities: health equity, social determinants of health, population and community health, prevention and health promotion, and systems and models of care.
- Continue the ONS partnership with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration’s Project Livin’ Label educational initiative to foster broad understanding of oncology product approvals.

### **Nurse Education**

ONS recommends that the U.S. Congress and the administration:

- Enact the *Palliative Care and Hospice Education and Training Act (PCHETA)*, which would improve palliative care and hospice training for nurses and other health professionals and establish programs for advanced practice providers to train and teach in palliative care, home care, hospice, long-term care, and other areas.
- Ensure sustained federal funding for the Title VIII Public Health Service Act Nursing Education programs.

### **Teleoncology**

The field of oncology rapidly adapted to the 154% increase in clinical care provided remotely following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The shift was facilitated by relaxed guidelines from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services but occurred without formal resources and education for nurses on how to evolve problem-based care over the telephone to full-care visits over video. ONS asks the U.S. Congress and the administration to:

- Promote access to virtual care and telehealth by ensuring permanent coverage, expansion of services, and support for technology and resources to advance this mode of health care.

### **Oncology Nurse Workforce Safety and Well-Being**

Although nurses have been the number one trusted profession for the past 21 years in a row, they encounter workplace violence and abuse at a higher rate than in any other profession in the United States. ONS urges the U.S. Congress and the administration to protect and support nurses on the front lines of patient care. Policymakers should work to:

- Safeguard the physical, mental, and emotional health of oncology nurses through measures that address nursing burnout and defend employees against healthcare workplace violence.
- Enact policies that recognize the substantive and growing body of evidence demonstrating the link between appropriate nurse staffing and better patient outcomes at every practice level in any healthcare delivery setting, while allowing for flexibility across care settings.

- Ensure that policies to expand access to home infusion of cancer treatment prioritize clinical appropriateness and the safety of patients, families, and healthcare workers.
- Prioritize the provision of culturally competent and culturally safe clinical practice, regardless of healthcare setting.

### **Scope of Practice**

For patients to access the most comprehensive, cost-effective care, oncology nurses must be able to practice to their full licensure and training. Throughout the COVID-19 public health emergency, federal and state agencies eased practice restrictions, maximizing access to care during the pandemic. ONS calls on the U.S. Congress and the administration to **preserve those flexibilities and promote oncology nurses' scope of practice, especially regarding new and innovative models of care delivery**, within the Medicare, Medicaid, and Veterans Health programs. In addition, ONS urges the U.S. Congress and the administration to ensure reimbursement policy is inclusive of nursing, including abolishing incident-to billing and allowing advanced practice RNs (APRNs) to bill directly for services provided.

### **Value of Oncology Nurses**

To maintain a robust oncology nursing workforce, it is imperative that federal policies recognize and reflect the true value of oncology nurses' essential contributions toward patient care and outcomes. To accomplish this, ONS advocates for Medicare payments and policies that capture and cover the full range of inpatient and outpatient oncology nursing services, including those provided by APRNs. ONS advocates for the establishment of "specialty designations" for APRNs, which would help distinguish oncology-specialized APRN activities from those of other cancer care providers and help researchers and policymakers understand the role of oncology nurses as members of the cancer care team, particularly when it comes to improving health equity. ONS also advocates for **reimbursement and other policies that facilitate the provision of primary care, chronic care management, and advance care planning services by oncology nurses**. ONS also seeks to integrate the nursing perspective throughout the policymaking process and supports the **nomination and appointment of oncology nurses to all relevant state and federal panels, committees, commissions, and boards**.

*ONS Board Approved; 2/13/23*