



People For Acupuncture, Inc  
Montpelier, Vermont  
[www.peopleforacupuncture.org](http://www.peopleforacupuncture.org)  
802-223-0954

## PRESS RELEASE

### New Opiate Bill Gets The Point: Vermonters Want Acupuncture

June 28, 2016 Montpelier, VT  
People For Acupuncture, Inc.

The Senate Health and Welfare Committee, along with the House Human Services Committee, took first steps to test acupuncture as a viable alternative to opiates for long-term pain management, this past legislative session, with the development of a pilot program for Medicaid patients suffering from chronic pain.

Should acupuncture meet expectations as an alternative to opiates, it is assumed members of the Vermont legislature will attempt to move towards a mandate of health insurance coverage of the treatment for certain conditions, and become the 12th state in the nation to do so.

The Opiate Bill, S.243, which was signed by Governor Shumlin on June 10, appropriates \$200,000 to pay for implementation of the pilot project.

Worldwide, acupuncture is used for pain management because while proven effective for several conditions, it is non-addictive, and has little to no side effects. Acupuncture is also used to alleviate opiate withdrawal symptoms in recovery centers, hospitals and jails around the globe.

The pilot program is under development and likely to begin within the next year. The new law requires the Department of Vermont Health Access to offer acupuncture to a cohort of Medicaid-eligible patients with a diagnosis of chronic pain, assessing the benefits in returning patients to social, occupational, and psychological function. An implementation plan is due to the legislature on or before January 15, 2017.

The issue of mandated insurance coverage for acupuncture treatment for certain conditions was first brought to the committees when People For Acupuncture, Inc, a newly-formed nonprofit made up of licensed acupuncturists and patients of acupuncture care, introduced a bill for mandated health insurance coverage for acupuncture at the beginning of the legislative session in January.

Conditions for which the group sought insurance coverage include: pain management, drug and alcohol addiction, anxiety and nausea. According to the group, these specific conditions have evidence-based studies that show that acupuncture is effective in treating them.

The original bill brought by People for Acupuncture was sponsored by Rep. Chris Pearson. While developing the bill, committees received testimony by Dr. Stephen Leffler of University of Vermont Medical Center, Dawn Philibert of the Department of Health, and the Vermont Acupuncture Association.

According to House Representative Chris Pearson, “This bill is a step in the right direction. We must do everything we can to curb the opiate crisis. Offering Vermonters choices for alternative treatments is a good idea and should help us prevent people from getting addicted in the first place.”

Despite the abundance of studies showing the effectiveness of acupuncture for chronic pain management, patients and providers report a barrier to care due to the lack of coverage of the treatment by most health insurance plans.

In Vermont, select plans such as Blue Cross and Blue Shield’s Vermont State Employees and employees of University of Vermont Medical Center, do include it. Plans offered on Vermont Health Connect do not offer acupuncture coverage at this time.

In addition to the pilot program and required studies, the committees also created the Controlled Substances and Pain Management Advisory Council and included representation of licensed acupuncturists.

For more information and to support the efforts of People For Acupuncture Inc, see [www.peopleforacupuncture.org](http://www.peopleforacupuncture.org).

Find a qualified and licensed acupuncturist in Vermont, at the Vermont Acupuncture Association’s website [www.vtaa.org](http://www.vtaa.org)

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Contact: Kerry Jenni M.S., L.Ac. 802-223-0954 [kerry@integrativeaom.com](mailto:kerry@integrativeaom.com)