

IN DEFENSE OF LIBERTY

State Lawmakers Must Not Wait For the Next Crisis Before Enacting Reforms

Jeffrey A. Singer

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One of the great lessons to be learned from the COVID-19 pandemic is that state-level licensing and “scope of practice” laws interfere with a rapid and nimble response by healthcare professionals to acutely shifting needs of patients in distress. To help deal with this public health emergency, many governors issued executive orders that temporarily allow healthcare practitioners who are licensed in any of the 50 states and the District of Columbia to provide in-person and telehealth services to patients in their states. Many governors also temporarily expanded the scope of practice of these licensed healthcare professionals, enabling them to practice to the full extent of their training. When this public health crisis finally ends, lawmakers must not allow licensing policy to return to the status quo ante.

Arizona has been a leader in occupational licensing reform, starting with a major reform in 2019 that recognizes the out-of-state occupational licenses of people moving into the state. When the Arizona legislature convenes in January 2021, it should build on these reforms.

One way to do so is to tap into pharmacists’ knowledge and training. In a new study released jointly by the Goldwater Institute and the R Street Institute, Courtney M. Joslin and I explain how and why the scope of practice of pharmacists should be expanded to allow them to perform tests and prescribe treatments for a variety of conditions. Doing so will help expand access to affordable healthcare for all patients and enhance their autonomy and choice.

In many ways, this public health emergency has been a “teachable moment.” State lawmakers should learn from it, and not wait for the next health crisis before enacting urgently needed reforms.

Jeffrey A. Singer, MD practices general surgery in Phoenix. He is a Visiting Fellow at the Goldwater Institute and a Senior Fellow at the Cato Institute.