



# AMERICAN ACADEMY OF ORTHOTISTS AND PROSTHETISTS

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## **Minimum Education Essentials & Credentialing for Providers of Custom-Fabricated and Custom-Fitted Orthoses and Prostheses**

The American Academy of Orthotists and Prosthetists (the Academy) is the premier organization representing professionals in the field of orthotics and prosthetics. The Academy is dedicated to promoting professionalism and advancing the standards of patient care through education, literature, research, advocacy, and collaboration.

Orthotists and prosthetists are allied health professionals (clinicians) who provide comprehensive orthotic and prosthetic care, including patient evaluation, formulation of treatment plans, fabrication or procurement of an appropriate device, and the provision of continuing care and patient management. Considering the unique blend of medical knowledge, engineering sciences, and technical skills necessary to ensure competency in the delivery of comprehensive orthotic and prosthetic care, extensive education directly related to this field is critical to protect the individuals requiring such care.

Educational requirements for orthotic and prosthetic practitioners have increased steadily since 1948 when the first such requirements were created by the American Board for Certification in Orthotics, Prosthetics & Pedorthics Inc. (ABC). These requirements have increased to reflect the evolving role of the orthotist and prosthetist on the allied healthcare team and the continuing influx of technological advances in the field. The National Commission on Orthotic and Prosthetic Education (NCOPE) has developed and maintains a set of minimum educational and experiential guidelines for the provision of orthotic and prosthetic care and, through the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP), accredits O&P education programs. CAAHEP is the national standard for accreditation of allied health programs. The currently accepted standards are embodied within the "Standards and Guidelines for an Accredited Educational Program for the Orthotic and Prosthetic Practitioner." They serve as the foundation for the "minimum" education for individuals wishing to pursue a career as a certified prosthetist and/or orthotist. In addition to this education, a candidate for certification must complete a NCOPE-approved residency before taking a certification exam administered by either the ABC or the Board of Certification/Accreditation (BOC). To maintain certification, sufficient continuing education is required to stay abreast of new technology and information that continues to improve the way orthotic and prosthetic care is provided.

There are fifteen states that have passed licensing laws regarding the provision of orthotic and prosthetic care. The requirements for licensure may differ from state to state. Requirements can be found at <http://www.oandp.org/licensuretoolkit/>. The Academy supports licensure to ensure that only qualified individuals may provide orthotic and prosthetic care.

It is the position of the Academy that physician-prescribed custom-fabricated and custom-fitted orthoses and prostheses should be provided by or under the direct supervision of orthotic and prosthetic clinicians who have met the educational and experiential requirements mandated by NCOPE and CAAHEP, have passed rigorous examinations, and maintain their certification via continuing education.