



**Testimony of the National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA)
U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation**

"Athlete Safety and the Integrity of U.S. Sport"

Wednesday, February 5, 2020

On behalf of the National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA), I am pleased to have the opportunity to provide testimony to the United States Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation on the important topic of protecting the health and safety of American athletes. My name is Tory Lindley and I am director of athletic training services at Northwestern University. I am also very proud to serve as the President of the National Athletic Trainers' Association.

NATA is a professional organization serving more than 46,000 certified athletic trainers, students of athletic training, and other health care professionals. Protecting the health and safety of athletes is exactly what NATA members have been doing since the organization was founded in 1950.

Background on the Athletic Training Profession

NATA's mission is to represent, engage, and foster the continued growth and development of the athletic training profession and athletic trainers as unique health care providers. Athletic trainers are health care professionals who collaborate with physicians to provide preventative services, emergency care, clinical diagnosis, therapeutic intervention, and rehabilitation of injuries. As part of the health care team, services provided by athletic trainers include injury and illness prevention, wellness promotion and education, emergent care, examination and clinical diagnosis, and therapeutic intervention.

Athletic trainers provide urgent and acute care of injuries; they specialize in preventing, diagnosing, and treating muscle and bone injuries. Athletic trainers are included under the allied health professions category as defined by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and are assigned National Provider Identifier numbers. In addition to employment by sports and athletic organizations, athletic trainers are employed by hospitals, clinics, occupational health departments, wellness facilities, the United States military, and numerous other health care settings.

Athletic trainers are highly qualified, multi-skilled health care professionals. To provide appropriate care for patients, athletic trainers receive training in prevention, recognition,

and treatment of critical situations. They must graduate from an accredited athletic training program. Currently, 76 percent of athletic trainers currently have a master's degree, and by 2022, a master's degree in athletic training will be the professional degree for all ATs.

Using a medical-based education model, comparable to other healthcare professions, athletic trainers serve as allied health professionals with an emphasis on clinical reasoning skills. The curriculum of an accredited athletic training program must include a comprehensive basic and applied science background and uses a competency-based approach in both the classroom and clinical settings.

Athletic training education programs are accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education (CAATE), which is recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation. The CAATE sets forth rigorous standards for the preparation of athletic training graduates that are science-based and didactic. CAATE also administers post-professional athletic training residency programs.

Upon completion of an accredited athletic training program, athletic trainers are required to pass a rigorous comprehensive examination administered by the Board of Certification, Inc. (BOC). The BOC certification program ensures that individuals have the knowledge and skills necessary to perform the tasks critical to safe and competent practice as an athletic trainer. Athletic trainers who pass the BOC's examination are awarded the ATC® credential.

Athlete Health and Safety Issues

NATA has long been a leader in health and safety issues facing athletes. We proactively provide our expertise and specific recommendations to policymakers at the local, state, and federal levels.

As a healthcare professional organization, we pride ourselves on developing and educating our members on the latest research, evidence, and narratives related to athlete safety. In fact, many athletic trainers are doing outstanding work in conducting research and analyzing trends in sports injury prevention and sports injury management.

NATA strongly believes Congress should fully invest in efforts to track youth sports injuries and fatalities. It is only with a comprehensive system for collecting and analyzing this data that we will be able to understand the scope of the problem and the best methods for addressing it.

Based upon current studies and reports, we know our nation faces many challenges in balancing an active and healthy sports culture while protecting the safety of the youth

athlete. I would like to provide the below statistics on athletic participation and athletic injuries in the United States:

- 470,000 collegiate-level athletes experience 210,000 injuries per year;
- At the secondary school level, there are 7.9 million athletes who sustain more than 1.4 million injuries per year;
- The 46.5 million children playing team sports experience 1.35 million injuries per year;
- Studies show that 62% of injuries occur during practice, as opposed to games or competitions; and
- 1.6 to 3.8 million sports-related concussions occur every year.

According to the CDC, on average, there are 2.7 million emergency room visits per year by children between five and 24 years of age for sport-related injuries. This means there are a staggering 7,397 emergency department visits per day and 308 emergency department visits per hour.

These injury statistics are compelling, but to athletic trainers, the most concerning fact is that the secondary school athletic population leads the nation in athletic-related deaths. Between 2008 and 2019, there have been more than 400 sports-related fatalities among young athletes. Let me underscore this fact; in an 11-year period, we lost over 400 children who were merely playing sports. As a nation, we must do a better job in protecting youth athletes while continuing to promote the benefits of sports participation.

Athletic trainers are experts in creating and applying strategies to decrease the instances of sudden death in athletic participation. However, only 37 percent of high schools employ a full-time athletic trainer. We need improved access to athletic trainers in secondary schools and youth-sports organizations as a primary prevention and management strategy.

The investment in proper safety measures including adequate medical supervision, such as a full-time athletic trainer, for sports practices and games begins to look like a solemn responsibility and skilled risk management when compared to a preventable fatal injury.

NATA's Leadership on Youth Athlete Safety Issues

NATA has made substantial investments, established meaningful partnerships, and led numerous initiatives to bring attention to youth athlete safety issues at a local, state, and national level. To that end, in 2010, NATA founded the Youth Sports Safety Alliance (YSSA), which is now comprised of more than 300 organizations. The members of YSSA range from parent advocate groups and research institutions to professional associations, health care organizations, and youth sports leagues.

Organized sports bring enormous health benefits to children, but certain factors may cause them to ignore pain and injuries, which could result in lifelong injuries or even death. NATA is working to promote and preserve sports, but we must also ensure that sports are played safely. When injuries occur, there must be qualified and trained medical personnel available to respond.

Since 2013, NATA has sponsored the Safe Sports School Award, a program designed to establish a standard for secondary school athlete safety and recognize those athletic programs that excel in taking all the necessary steps to ensure athlete safety. To date, there have been more than 2,100 schools across the country that have received the award.

Beginning in 2019, NATA partnered with the Korey Stringer Institute and the NFL Foundation on the Team Up for Sports Safety (TUFFS) program, to encourage all states to develop and implement standard policies and best practices to reduce sports related injuries for student athletes. As part of this effort, KSI and NATA members plan to host meetings with local high school sports leaders and state legislators in all fifty states. Efforts are focusing on the more than 90% of sport related deaths among secondary school athletes due to four causes: cardiac arrest, exertional heat stroke, traumatic brain injuries, and exertional sickling.

Promoting Physical Activity

Central to the mindset of an athletic trainer is the understanding of the physical and mental health benefits of an active lifestyle. While NATA has worked to raise awareness of youth athlete safety issues, we have remained steadfast in our efforts to promote the benefits of physical activity and sports.

NATA has taken a leadership role within several national coalitions involved in promoting physical activity issues. These include being represented on the Board of Directors of the National Physical Activity Plan Alliance and the National Coalition to Promote Physical Activity.

NATA members frequently visit Capitol Hill, urging Members of Congress to support the *Personal Health Investment Today Act* or the *PHIT Act*. We thank Senators Thune and Capito for their leadership on the bill and the many committee members who are cosponsors. The legislation provides an incentive for adults and their children to get fit, which will help prevent health care costs related to preventable chronic diseases.

The Opioid and Prescription Drug Epidemic

Athletic trainers' involvement in the health and safety of youth athletes is not limited to the playing field. Athletic trainers are uniquely qualified and extremely well positioned to recognize the signs and symptoms related to opioid and prescription drug abuse,

particularly among patients rehabilitating from injuries. They are also experts in identifying other methods of chronic pain management like manual medicine and rehabilitation. NATA continues to support proposals to increase access to and training in administering naloxone.

Other Federal Legislative and Regulatory Policy Issues

Finally, I want to join my fellow athletic trainers and the more than 46,000 members of NATA in thanking Senators John Thune and Amy Klobuchar, and other members of the United States Senate for passing the *Sports Medicine Licensure Clarity Act* in the 115th Congress.

Thank you for this opportunity to present the views of the National Athletic Trainers' Association.