



PROJECT FUTURE

**A BOLD VISION OF WHAT
OSTEOPATHIC MEDICINE
CAN AND WILL BE**

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American Osteopathic Foundation: Project Future A Bold Vision of What Osteopathic Medicine Can and Will Be

This is our future.

The American Osteopathic Foundation (AOF) launched the Project Future Initiative (PFI) as part of our collaborative strategic planning process in a fast-evolving medical and sociocultural landscape reflecting a **growing presence and impact** of our Osteopathic Profession today: ¹

- **Over 200,000** Osteopathic physicians and medical students
- **Over 160,000** DOs in the US, representing **11%** of all physicians
- **Increase of 1,721%** in the number of DOs since 1935
- **Over 25%** of all US medical students

Our ultimate purpose for **Project Future** is to bring divergent thinkers together to establish a shared vision for the Osteopathic Profession, one that is supported by thoughtful strategies that confidently engage and address current healthcare system challenges and anticipate future system evolution. Our vision embraces our profession's human-centered clinical practice philosophy to build a truly better future for American healthcare and population health.

The context for the PFI includes:

- **Enduring access-related challenges within the American healthcare system** related to [limited service availability in underserved and rural areas](#);² [ongoing shortage of medical professionals](#);³ and [increasing reliance on international medical graduates](#) to address workforce needs⁴

¹ All statistics from "2025 Osteopathic Medical Profession Report announces the profession has surpassed the 200,000 mark," American Osteopathic Association, 2025, <https://osteopathic.org/about/aoa-statistics/>

² Kevin Matthews, Katie Spears, Charkarra Anderson-Lewis, "Rural Health Disparities: Contemporary Solutions for Persistent Rural Public Health Challenges," *Preventing Chronic Disease*, 2025, 22, <http://dx.doi.org/10.5888/pcd22.250202>

³ Pooja Kumar, Tania Holt, and Yenli Wong, "Heartbeat of Health: Reimagining the Healthcare Workforce of the Future," McKinsey Health Institute Report, May 14, 2025, <https://www.mckinsey.com/mhi/our-insights/heartbeat-of-health-reimagining-the-healthcare-workforce-of-the-future>

⁴ Selma Hedlund, "America Is Increasingly Dependent on Foreign Doctors—But Their Path to Immigration Is Getting Harder," *The Conversation*, September 25, 2024, <https://theconversation.com/america-is-increasingly-dependent-on-foreign-doctors-but-their-path-to-immigration-is-getting-harder-229980>

- **The problem of high, rising healthcare costs:** the **U.S. leads the world** on this measure,⁵ despite our **population health ranking as last** among high-income countries⁶
- **Healthcare-quality concerns and persistent, mounting health disparities** in specific populations and communities over many decades

To bring our vision for the future to life, we first recruited well-established Subject Matter Experts to deliver comprehensive observations on contemporary issues in healthcare; the current impact of Osteopathic Medicine on populations served; best practices within the profession; data-based documentation on the profession's contributions to healthcare; and current changes the healthcare system is undergoing. We then convened multiple forums of Thought Leaders with applicable experience and expertise to review the experts' observations and participate in thoughtful, broad-ranging group dialogue to surface insights, divergent thinking, opportunities, and recommendations to shape a multi-dimensional vision for the Osteopathic Profession.

We held four separate forums over the span of three years to ensure relevant changes were captured and provide a platform for new, emerging voices. The forums were dedicated to these topics:

- **Professional Identity** (April 2023)
- **Medical Education** (September 2023)
- **Clinical Practice** (March 2025)
- **Research** (March 2025)

After completing the forums we held discussions with Student Leaders for each topic in July 2025, to gather additional insights, feedback, and collective recommendations.

This Vision Paper presents a summary of the main takeaways and collective recommendations from the forums, along with practical steps we can take to achieve our bold vision. Together these represent the future of what Osteopathic Medicine can and will be.

5 Maria Aspan, "Healthcare Costs Are Soaring. Blame Insurers, Drug Companies—and Your Employer," NPR, September 12, 2025, <https://www.npr.org/2025/09/12/nx-s1-5534416/health-care-costs-soaring-blame-your-employer>

6 David Blumenthal, Evan Gumas, Arnav Shah, et al., "Mirror, Mirror 2024: A Portrait of the Failing U.S. Health System," Commonwealth Fund Report, 2024, <https://www.commonwealthfund.org/publications/fund-reports/2024/sep/mirror-mirror-2024>

Executive Summary of the Project Future Forums

Shaping Our Future Professional Identity

- **Strategic branding under a big tent:** By building on our foundational strengths and deep engagement of public health, our brand has the power to unify the profession across disciplines, bringing all of us together and leveraging our unique sense of community and cohesion that makes Osteopathic Physicians stand out among medical practitioners.
- **Education, research, collaboration:** We have a rich opportunity to communicate our value proposition early on, to students, and to use research to document our positive impact on access, cost, and outcomes, via a collaborative effort across our organizations through Ambassadors and other means.
- **Technology integration:** Technology has become a key part of our identity, leveling the playing field and enabling us to be digitally hands-on while still upholding our Philosophy and Principles and creating more time to focus on rural and other areas that have fewer technological resources.

Creating a Vision for Osteopathic Medical Education

- **Pathway programs and coursework/certification:** We can strategically create undergraduate pathway programs and provide courses on health, policy, and basic research, along with CME in Augmented Intelligence (AI), Precision Medicine, Social Determinants of Health, and Reducing Systemic Bias in Patient Care.
- **Mentorship and support:** Let's provide structured support for students including mentorship, recruitment pipelines, and resources for underrepresented groups, to promote even greater growth and equity.
- **Osteopathic Principles:** Incorporation of Osteopathic Principles and Practices including the interrelatedness of systems and manual skills into all clinical training sites will help us deliver even more consistent, high-quality care profession-wide.

Defining the Osteopathic Clinical Practice of the Future

- **Corporatization and consolidation:** DOs are increasingly employees rather than practice-owners, and will benefit from training in the business of medicine—along with new delivery models and technology—as we also emphasize the financial benefit of our philosophy of individualized, wellness-focused care in an increasingly corporatized environment.

- **Rising specialization:** With rising specialization, let's seek mutually reinforcing opportunities to maintain our shared identity through communication and incentives, with a focus on Principles of care like whole-body orientation.
- **Health equity:** Recognizing social and structural health determinants, incorporating inclusiveness into our thinking, and speaking to community stakeholders wherever we can will help us maintain our critical focus on population health and increase health equity.

Developing the Osteopathic Research Agenda of the Future

- **Research areas:** Guide our research and fund-seeking by what we own in medicine, with prime areas including the impact of Osteopathic Medicine (OM) and the many benefits of our empathy-based, hands-on approach to diagnosis and treatment.
- **Potential barriers:** The large discrepancy in funding for allopathic versus osteopathic research means we must advance our brand identity and identify osteopathic researcher role models as part of a cultural shift that starts at the top.
- **Key steps:** Near-term, high-impact to-do's include building a cross-school hub to produce research, pooling of data from across our institutions, and boosting our presence on boards and hearings to seek research support and funding.

The next sections provide more detail on these insights and recommendations, followed by practical steps we can take now toward our vision for the Future of Osteopathic Medicine.

Shaping Our Future Professional Identity

Understanding, developing, and communicating our identity as Osteopathic Physicians is our most important issue, and we advocate a “high-ground,” non-defensive, forward-looking approach based on these insights and recommendations from our Professional Identity Forum.

Brand our profession strategically. Our past success positions us to *lead* the future of medicine. We have the opportunity to build our brand on Osteopathic Medicine's foundation of strong engagement in public health, including decades-long provision of healthcare to underserved, rural, and minority populations, and achievement of parity with allopathic colleagues on all dimensions. As part of our brand let's leverage our unique sense of community and cohesion that makes us stand out among medical practitioners.

Create a big tent. While our longstanding strength has been in primary care disciplines, we can apply our wholistic philosophy and clinical approach to all specialties. Promoting “health” comprehensively across medical disciplines, using the training and practices we share, will create an even greater sense of unity and enhance quality of care.

Harness education and research. Osteopathic identity begins in the pathway to medical school. Our inspiring collective identity is a central part of the value proposition we can communicate to students from the start. Research efforts pivotal to our identity include those documenting the value of the

doctor-patient relationship to health outcomes and how the growth of Osteopathic Medicine affects access, cost, and quality of care—such as showcasing how our approach of prevention and wellness improve both outcomes and healthcare efficiency.

Promote collaboration through Osteopathic vision and identity. Our collective vision and identity constitute the ideal vehicle to promote greater cohesiveness within our community, those we serve, and broader society. Identification and appointment of dynamic Communication Ambassadors would ensure powerful, consistent messaging profession-wide.

Use emerging technology for whole-person care. The [billions of dollars invested annually in medical technologies](#) in recent years⁷ have meaningful implications for our traditional, hands-on approach. We can use technology to be digitally hands-on and uphold our core focus on comprehensive promotion of health across assessment, intervention, and follow-up, while freeing more time to deliver care to rural and other areas lacking technological resources.

Creating a Vision for Osteopathic Medical Education

Our Medical Education Forum covered functional areas including pre-matriculation and medical school admissions, Undergraduate Medical Education (UME), Graduate Medical Education (GME), and Continuing Medical Education (CME). It acted as a catalyst for these key insights and recommendations below, which form a roadmap for the future of Osteopathic Medical Education.

Highlight Osteopathic distinctiveness. The time is right to build application of our Osteopathic Identity into all education programs, across specialties, including a focus on the profession's history, cohesiveness, tenets, patient-care lens, and a decentralized medical education model. This will highlight and advance our distinctiveness among medical physicians.

Establish early pathway programs. We have an opportunity to create undergraduate pathway programs and a holistic, thoughtful admissions process to identify high-potential future Osteopathic Students to deliver on both the art and science of our profession and uphold our distinctiveness and commitment to quality care for all communities.

Develop and deliver required coursework. To ensure comprehensive education and career preparation for Osteopathic Physicians, we can create and assess health policy, business, and basic research courses for all Undergraduate Medical Education (UME) students, including coverage of economic drivers of the profession such as rural economy dynamics and student debt.

⁷ "EY Pulse of the MedTech Industry Report 2025: MedTech vital signs are robust, reigniting growth and expanding markets in a disrupted healthcare landscape," EY Report, September 29, 2025, https://www.ey.com/en_us/newsroom/2025/09/ey-releases-pulse-of-the-medtech-report-2025

Provide career guidance and personal support. We have an opportunity to provide structured personal/career support and mentorship for students as related to wellness, leadership, and career paths, along with recruitment pipelines and dedicated support for underrepresented stakeholders. This will promote even greater growth and equity within our profession.

Enable community-related education. Creating and enabling community-related education opportunities—coursework, clinical experiences—will help us ensure an Osteopathic Physician “product” is highly competent to deliver healthcare in our widespread community settings of focus.

Promote international DO/MD parity. Let’s continue to develop and implement targeted medical education strategies to achieve parity of international DO and MD degrees, including experiential learning for students, faculty exchanges, and establishment of international osteopathic academic campuses.

Codify and expand faculty development. By developing and delivering CME in AI, Precision Medicine, Social Determinants of Health, and Systemic Biases impacting health outcomes related to religion, race, socio-economic status, mental health, and substance abuse, we can ensure all faculty stay current in developing the next generation of DOs.

Embed our Osteopathic Principles. There is a large opportunity to extend and require education related to the Osteopathic Philosophy and Tenets, the inter-relatedness of systems, and manual neuromusculoskeletal skills into all clinical training sites for UME and GME, to promote our core principles for the benefit of both physicians and patients.

Defining the Osteopathic Clinical Practice of the Future

Our Clinical Practice Forum covered how to establish the most effective practices in our discipline and develop our voice, value, and vision. The event generated insights around these five themes.

Evolve with corporatization and consolidation. With more physicians now **employed than owning practices**⁸—including rising private-equity presence—DOs need training in the business of medicine to improve productivity (RVUs) while providing human-centered care. Emphasizing the financial advantages of our Osteopathic Philosophy of individualized, wellness-focused care at point-of-service, for example, will help us deliver value of all types to all stakeholders.

Shape the delivery models of the future. We can harness technology and the increasing number of touchpoints to drive better patient care and scale our focus on individualized, preventative intervention. We are in a strong position to lead coordination of whole-person care. Let’s work to establish a study committee with representatives from AOA, AACOM, and AOF to align technology integration fully with Osteopathic Principles.

⁸ “More Physicians Move to Practices Owned by Hospitals and Private Equity Groups,” AMA Report, May 29, 2025, <https://www.ama-assn.org/press-center/ama-press-releases/more-physicians-move-practices-owned-hospitals-private-equity>

Leverage AI and precision medicine. We have an opportunity to reconcile the scale AI delivers with our humanizing approach through thoughtful implementation—to take away burdens (billing, burnout) and focus on the person and community. It’s about augmentation, not replacement, of physician work, especially our literal hands-on human touch, through deployment of new technologies with specific objectives in mind including upholding our Osteopathic Principles.

Maintain Osteopathic Identity amidst rising specialization. With about [45% of DOs in specialties](#)⁹ and DOs practicing [OMT on less than 5% of patients](#),¹⁰ it’s important to maintain our shared identity through communication and incentives, with focus on principles of care like whole-body orientation and alignment of specific principles with individual specialties. We can better integrate Osteopathic Manipulative Treatment (OMT) across disciplines, using research like [this](#) (benefits of OMT for infants ¹¹) and [this](#) (OMT boosts effectiveness of COVID mRNA vaccine ¹²) to highlight its effectiveness.

Promote health equity and population health. It’s critical to maintain our focus on population health by recognizing social and structural determinants of health (race, economic status, immigration policy, etc.) and speaking at community events, health fairs, and others, creating safe spaces for community members and practitioners. Let’s work to further incorporate inclusive, community/structural thinking into our training.

Developing the Osteopathic Research Agenda of the Future

The Research Forum covered opportunities and challenges for producing high-quality Osteopathic research. The discussion emphasized alignment of our research agenda with our practice philosophy and principles as the most cohesive team in medicine—as suggested by these insights and recommendations.

Set an evolving, big-picture agenda. We have an opportunity to use what we own within medicine to guide our research and attract funding—asking big questions and answering them with our rich data sets. We can take a systematic approach encompassing all of Osteopathic Medicine, starting with analyzing anything that touches the muscles, then moving to the brain and elsewhere, with appreciation for our strengths in service and community.

9 “2025 Osteopathic Medical Profession Report announces the profession has surpassed the 200,000 mark,” American Osteopathic Association, 2025, <https://osteopathic.org/about/aoa-statistics/>

10 Colson Healy, Matthew Brockway, & Benjamin Wilde, “Osteopathic manipulative treatment (OMT) use among osteopathic physicians in the United States,” *Journal of Osteopathic Medicine*, 2021, 121(1), 57-61, doi: 10.1515/jom-2020-0013

11 Hollis King, Julia Mai, Mary Anne Morelli Haskell, et al., “Effects of osteopathic manipulative treatment on children with plagiocephaly in the context of current pediatric practice: a retrospective chart review study,” *Journal of Osteopathic Medicine*, 2024, 124(4), 171-177, doi: 10.1515/jom-2023-0168

12 Eric Martinez, Sebastien Fuchs, Hendrik Szurmant, et al., “COVID-19 mRNA vaccine immune response to the addition of osteopathic manipulative treatment with lymphatic pumps: A randomized controlled trial,” *Virus Research*, September 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.virusres.2025.199607>

Research the impact of Osteopathic Medicine. OMT is core to our mission and impact. Let's take important steps to own the related research space by increasing sample sizes (through a consortium of schools), producing/publicizing OMT-related studies and trends, and making our terminology in this area more understandable and accessible to broader audiences.

Document the science and art of empathy. We are “hyper-empathetic,” a key differentiator that likely improves outcomes in our patients. Studies show [empathy declines in later medical-education years](#),¹³ but anecdotally [this decrease is lower in DOs than MDs](#).¹⁴ Let's fund research to document such observations and inform more systematic development of empathy-driven intervention, such as an app linking self-care practices to empathy.

Recognize potential barriers. We are swimming against the tide, with Osteopathic medical schools receiving only [0.1% of NIH funding](#) and the remainder going to allopathic schools.¹⁵ We can promote success through strategic advancement of our brand identity, development of more Osteopathic researcher role models, and a cultural shift to emphasize research from the top-down.

Let's take these near-term steps. To advance our research agenda and presence, key steps including building a cross-school research hub to enable studies and produce applicable findings; pooling and analyzing data from Osteopathic institutions; working to boost DO presence on boards, meetings, and Congressional hearings to promote research and seek funding; incorporating emerging technologies like AI to track Osteopathic impact.

The Future Is Now: Near-Term Steps Toward Our Vision

Based on the previous sections, here are practical opportunities we can capture now, to advance toward our bold vision for the Future of Osteopathic Medicine in each of the forum areas.

Professional Identity

- Create a group across AOF, AOA, AACOM, and schools to work on a unifying brand built on our wholistic approach and service to underserved populations, to lead the future of medicine.

13 Mohammedreza Hojat, Michael Vergare, Kaye Maxwell, et al., “The devil is in the third year: A longitudinal study of erosion of empathy in medical school,” *Academic Medicine*, 2009, 84(9), 1182-1191, doi: 10.1097/ACM.0b013e3181b17e55

14 Hojat, Mohammadreza, Stephen C. Shannon, Jennifer DeSantis, Mark R. Speicher, Lynn Bragan, and Leonard H. Calabrese. “Does Empathy Decline in the Clinical Phase of Medical Education? A Nationwide, Multi-Institutional, Cross-Sectional Study of Students at DO-Granting Medical Schools.” *Academic Medicine* 95(6), June 2020: 911-918, <https://doi.org/10.1097/ACM.0000000000003175>.

15 “Congress Pushes NIH to Boost Funding for Osteopathic Medical Research,” American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine, September 30, 2024, <https://www.aacom.org/news-reports/news/2024/09/30/congress-pushes-nih-to-boost-funding-for-osteopathic-medical-research>

- Identify and appoint official Communication Ambassadors, exemplary Osteopathic Medical Physicians who can convey brand-related messaging within our field and to outside stakeholders.
- Take steps to incorporate strong elements of technology into our brand identity, aiming to be “digitally hands-on” while upholding our core focus on comprehensive promotion of health including community health.

Medical Education

- Establish undergraduate pathway programs and holistic admissions process to identify high-potential future Osteopathic Students.
- Embrace health policy, business, and basic research courses for all UME students, including coverage of economic drivers of the profession.
- Create student support structures including mentorship on career paths and recruitment pipelines, along with dedicated support for underrepresented students.
- Develop and deliver CME in AI, Precision Medicine, Social Determinants of Health, and Systemic Biases impacting health outcomes.

Clinical Practice

- Take steps to provide education in Business of Medicine at UME, GME, and CME levels.
- Establish a study group with Osteopathic leaders to promote alignment of technology integration with Osteopathic Principles, including AI.
- Identify (1) incentives/disincentives that influence specialty choice and (2) specific Osteopathic Principles aligned with each specialty.
- Move toward requiring inclusion of knowledge and practice of Osteopathic Principles in licensure, re-licensure, specialty certification, and recertification process for all specialties.

Research

- Work with AOF, AOA, and AACOM to define our research pathway and pipeline, including clarifying language and academic research pathways, into clearer research identity/agenda.
- Build collaborative, cross-school research committee/hub and research warehouse to promote individual/collective research and secure evidence-based data.
- Take steps to pool research across institutions and mobilize it, such as aggregating findings from smaller studies and structuring/analyzing unanalyzed raw data.
- Work to enhance DO champion presence on key boards, and in meetings and Congressional hearings to present our research agenda and find support—AOA can help identify these champions.

We are excited about the future of Osteopathic Medicine and welcome you to join us in making our vision a reality, for the benefit of our field and all of its stakeholders.

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Thank you to all Subject Matter Experts and Thought Leaders for your time and expertise.

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