

White Paper Licensure for Respiratory Care Practitioners in Alaska

What's the issue?

Alaska is the only state in the United States that does not professionally license Respiratory Care Practitioners. In Alaska today, respiratory therapists, the clinicians who manage ventilators, assist with life-saving procedures, and provide essential care to patients with respiratory failure, are not required to hold a license. This creates a dangerous gap in oversight, accountability, and public protection.

What Medical Services do Respiratory Care Practitioners Provide?

Respiratory Care Practitioners manage some of the most technically complex and life critical tasks in patient care, especially in intensive care units, emergency departments, and during public health emergencies, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Without licensing, there is no formal way to ensure these provide meet minimum qualifications or to protect the public from negligence or misconduct.

What will licensure do?

- It ensures that only qualified, credentialed professionals deliver this complex, high-risk care.
- Protects patients and ensures professional accountability.
- Defines a clear scope of practice in line with national standards, establishing biannual renewal, and requiring continuing education to keep clinical skills up to date.
- Requires the Registered Respiratory Therapist (RRT) credential for new licensees, aligning with national standards and current health care needs.
- Grandfathers existing Certified Respiratory Therapists (CRTs) working in the state, recognizing their service while maintaining a high standard of care.

Licensing Respiratory Care Practitioners protects patients, modernizes our health care system, and reaffirms our commitment to high-quality, professional care for Alaskans.