

My name is Eldon Johnson, and thank you for allowing me to testify in favor of HB 1328, which would allow for better access to Vitamin D screening and intervention.

Vitamin D, aka the “Sunshine Vitamin,” has long been recognized for its important role in bone health. Without it, the body cannot absorb the calcium that is ingested, so it steals calcium from bones, thereby increasing the risk of osteoporosis and fractures. As a physical therapist, these are devastating medical issues that I see on a daily basis in the clinic—especially prevalent in the elderly. As if bone health wasn’t important enough of a reason to ensure we have appropriate levels of Vitamin D in our bodies, the list is much, much longer. Vitamin D controls a tremendous amount of genes, including some associated with cancers, autoimmune and cardiovascular disease, obesity, diabetes, multiple sclerosis, and infections. Additional symptoms of Vitamin D deficiency include having frequent colds and viruses, depression, low energy, chronic fatigue, and muscle and bone pain. Scientific studies on the importance of proper Vitamin D levels are increasing at a rapid rate. The current evidence is so compelling that many experts already recommend at least 800 to 1000 IU of Vitamin D per day for adults.

I love North Dakota, and have been a Nodak’er my entire life. However, one thing that our beautiful state does not provide is very much direct sunlight during the winter months. Because of this, the skin makes little, if any, Vitamin D from the sun. Research has shown that up to 85% of people living north of the 37<sup>th</sup> parallel—which is the northern 2/3 of the United States—are Vitamin D deficient. Therefore, North Dakotans are at a higher risk for the potentially catastrophic illnesses and diseases listed above, as well as seasonal colds and viruses. Of recent significance, scientific studies have found that 80% of those infected by the novel coronavirus were deficient in vitamin D, while those with appropriate vitamin D levels were much less likely to be infected. This is another powerful example of the danger of being deficient in the sunshine vitamin.

The good news is that Vitamin D levels are very easy to check, through a simple blood test. The bad news is that most people have never had this blood test, as it is not in the basic blood panel test that is done for yearly physicals. With the mounting evidence regarding the necessity of maintaining proper vitamin D levels, my hope is that this becomes routine testing at medical visits.

Unfortunately, there is another barrier to our citizens getting tested for vitamin D levels. This is the fact that there is very minimal to no reimbursement by most health insurances for it. Because of that, many physicians are not going to order the testing, knowing the patient will have to pay for it out of pocket. For that same reason, many patients are not going to ask for the test, nor do they understand the importance of it in our climate.

With all of this being stated, I urge you to support and pass HB 1328, which will allow for much easier access to testing for vitamin D levels, as well as improving reimbursement by 3<sup>rd</sup> party payers in our state.

Thank you for allowing me to provide written testimony on this bill today, as I was unable to be there via Zoom or in person.

Sincerely,

Eldon Johnson, PT, MPT, CSMT, Cert MDT