

ENHANCE MEDICARE ACCESS TO AUDIOLOGY SERVICES

MODERNIZE MEDICARE POLICY TO IMPROVE BENEFICIARY ACCESS & OUTCOMES

ACTION REQUESTED

Cosponsor the Medicare Audiologist Access and Services Act of 2021 (H.R. 1587/S. 1731).

ISSUE: Medicare Does Not Provide Comprehensive Coverage of Audiology Services

Medicare only covers diagnostic tests performed by audiologists to assess hearing and balance when ordered by a physician.

- Audiologists' scope of practice includes auditory and vestibular treatment and neurological monitoring.
- Timely access to diagnosis and treatment for hearing and vestibular conditions may improve outcomes for beneficiaries and reduce overall cost of care because of enhanced compliance and communication.
- Administrative requirements for referral and oversight unnecessarily delay care and increase costs.
- Untreated hearing loss may lead to depression, anxiety, and emotional instability.¹
- The National Academy of Sciences issued a report, "Hearing Health Care for Adults: Priorities for Improving Access and Affordability," which recommended Medicare coverage of audiologic treatment.²
- Most private health plans allow for direct access to audiology services, which is consistent with state laws.
- Vestibular and audiologic treatments (within an audiologist's scope of practice under state law) are services currently covered under Medicare benefits when provided by other practitioners.
- The World Health Organization notes that social isolation resulting from COVID-19 lockdowns has heightened the importance of ear and hearing care, highlighting that rehabilitation can help ensure that those affected, and society at large, avoid the adverse consequences.³

SOLUTION: Cosponsor H.R. 1587/S. 1731, Which Would Improve Beneficiary Access to Audiology Services by Recognizing Audiologists as Independent Practitioners Who Can Provide Treatment and Diagnostic Services Under Medicare

- Expand coverage to include all Medicare covered diagnostic and treatment services that correspond to the scope of practice in audiology.
- Allow for direct access to audiology services by removing unnecessary language requiring a physician order.
- Reclassify audiologists from "supplier" to "practitioner" to better recognize the role audiologists play in providing hearing health care and enable audiology services to be delivered through telehealth.

¹ Oxford Academic. (May 2012). Hearing-impaired adults are at increased risk of experiencing emotional distress and social engagement restrictions five years later. <https://academic.oup.com/ageing/article/41/5/618/47025/Hearing-impaired-adults-are-at-increased-risk-of>.

² National Academies of Sciences Engineering Medicine. (2016). Hearing Health Care for Adults: Priorities for Improving Access and Affordability. <http://nationalacademies.org/hmd/reports/2016/Hearing-Health-Care-for-Adults.aspx>.

³ World Health Organization. (2021). World Report on Hearing: Executive Summary. <https://www.who.int/health-topics/hearing-loss>.

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