

NEWS

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The American Academy of Audiology Endorses Medicare Audiologist Access and Services Act of 2019 Legislation introduced yesterday in the U.S. House of Representatives

RESTON, Va., July 26, 2019— The American Academy of Audiology announced its support for bipartisan legislation introduced yesterday in the U.S. House of Representatives by Reps. Tom Rice (R-S.C.), Matt Cartwright (D-Pa.), Mark Meadows (R-N.C.), Ralph Norman (R-S.C.), Mike Kelly (R-Pa.), Jan Shakowsky (D-Ill.), Brad Schneider (D-Ill.), Ann Kuster (D-N.H.), Gus Bilirakis (R-Fla.), and Lisa Blunt-Rochester (D-Del.). This legislation has also been endorsed by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, the Academy of Doctors of Audiology and the Hearing Loss Association of America. Sens. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) and Rand Paul (R-Ky.) plan to introduce imminently a Senate companion bill.

The Medicare Audiologist Access and Services Act of 2019 ([H.R. 4056](#)) will remove unnecessary barriers, allowing patients to receive appropriate, timely, and cost-effective audiologic care. This legislation can improve outcomes for beneficiaries by allowing direct access to audiologic services and streamlining Medicare coverage policies so that audiologists can provide the full range of Medicare-covered diagnostic and treatment services that correspond to their scope of practice.

The legislation would also reclassify audiologists as practitioners, which is consistent with the way Medicare recognizes other non-physician providers, such as clinical psychologists, clinical social workers, and advanced practice registered nurses. This legislation will ensure that Medicare beneficiaries have access to the same level of audiological care available in the Veterans Health Administration, under the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program and under private insurance

“Moving this legislation forward is imperative in ensuring that older Americans receive the hearing health and balance care coverage they need,” explained the American Academy of Audiology President Lisa Christensen, Au.D. Christensen is also audiology program manager for Cook Children’s Medical Center in Ft. Worth, Texas. She continued, “the Veterans Health Administration has affirmed that its direct access policy is cost-effective.” As early as 2004, the VHA has communicated to Congress about the efficiency of this policy in improving access without compromising quality patient care. “This legislation aligns with Medicare and the VHA and other federal programs as well as implements the recommendation from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine regarding Medicare coverage of audiological treatment.”

There is growing recognition of the critical importance of ensuring that seniors have sufficient access to hearing and balance-related services. This past June, the American Academy of Audiology provided written comments in response to a Senate Special Committee on Aging request for recommendations on prevention and management of fall and fall-related injuries in older adults. Academy comments emphasized the clear link between hearing loss and falls as well as the role of the audiologist in the identification and treatment of hearing and balance disorders. Academy comments also recommended that allowing Medicare beneficiaries direct access to audiologist services would expand beneficiary access to services, thereby perhaps

staving off the devastating downstream effects of untreated hearing loss and balance disorders such as falls.

“Hearing loss can have other serious impacts as well,” stated Christensen. “It has been well documented that untreated hearing loss can lead to cognitive decline, depression and isolation in addition to falls. It can seriously impact quality of life.”

To ensure that older adults have adequate access to hearing health care services, “AAA, ASHA and ADA agreed to join forces to develop legislation that expands access to and coverage of audiology services under Medicare and recognized the importance of agreeing on a unified approach,” Christensen explained. “For Medicare beneficiaries who need hearing and balance health care services, it is critical that audiology services be positioned to support evidence-based care and for the full scope of practice for audiologists to be recognized.”

For more information, visit www.audiology.org.

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The American Academy of Audiology is the world's largest professional organization of, by and for audiologists. Representing the interests of approximately 14,000 audiologists nationwide, the Academy is dedicated to providing quality hearing care services through professional development, education, research, and increased public awareness of hearing and balance disorders. For more information or to find an audiologist, go to www.howsyourhearing.org.