

**ISSUE BRIEF**

**Medicare Hearing Health Care Enhancement Act of 2011 (H.R. 2140)**

Representative Mike Ross (D-AR) has introduced the Medicare Hearing Health Care Enhancement Act of 2010 (H.R. 2140- the Direct Access bill) in the U.S. House of Representatives. This legislation was introduced with 11 original co-sponsors. The bipartisan legislation would allow Medicare beneficiaries the option of going directly to a qualified audiologist for hearing and balance diagnostic tests. Currently, Medicare requires that beneficiaries with hearing loss or balance disorders obtain a physician referral before seeing an audiologist.

- The Office of Personnel Management allows federal employees and Members of Congress to directly access audiologists through the Federal Employees Health Benefit Plan.
- Veterans, who have completed the necessary requirements to establish eligibility for healthcare services through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), have been afforded direct access to audiology services since 1992 and the administration has reported this policy allows the VA to provide “high quality, efficient and cost effective hearing care” to veterans.
- Audiologists are licensed in all 50 States and the District of Columbia where the scope of services is determined by those jurisdictions. The Medicare statute recognizes state licensure as the appropriate standard for determining who is a qualified audiologist.
- Medicare currently allows beneficiaries direct access to a range of non-MD/DO providers including: podiatrists, optometrists, chiropractors, clinical nurse specialists, clinical psychologists, clinical social workers, nurse-midwives, nurse practitioners, and physician assistants.
- Approximately 36 million Americans experience some degree of hearing loss and that number is expected to increase to 78 million Americans by 2030.
- Hearing impairment is one of the most common conditions affecting older adults, with approximately 33 percent of Americans aged 60 and over and 40-50 percent of those aged 75 and older with hearing loss.
- Hearing loss is a major barrier to participating in society, both economically and socially.
- Hearing loss among senior citizens, if left untreated, can result in isolation and depression.