



## ISSUE BRIEF

### **Medicare Hearing Health Care Enhancement Act of 2007 (H.R. 1665/ S. 2352)**

Representative Mike Ross (D-AR) has introduced the Medicare Hearing Health Care Enhancement Act of 2007 (H.R. 1665). Senator Tim Johnson (D-SD) has introduced this bill in the Senate (S. 2352). 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 Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has allowed veterans to directly access audiologists and has reported that this policy, adopted in 1992, provides “high-quality, efficient, and cost-effective hearing care.”
- The Office of Personnel Management allows federal employees and Members of Congress to directly access audiologists through the Federal Employees Health Benefit Plan.
- Audiologists are licensed in the 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-physician practitioners including: podiatrists, optometrists, chiropractors, clinical nurse specialists, clinical psychologists, clinical social workers, nurse-midwives, nurse practitioners, and physician assistants.
- Approximately 31 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.