

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF AUDIOLOGY

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October 22, 2010

The Honorable Kathleen Sebelius
Department of Health and Human Services
Hubert H. Humphrey Building
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Sebelius:

On behalf of the American Academy of Audiology (“Academy”), and its more than 11,000 members worldwide, I commend your leadership in the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). As you continue to work toward implementing the health care reforms agreed to by Congress earlier this year, the Academy earnestly offers our assistance to the Agency. The Academy represents audiology professionals committed to providing quality hearing and balance care and we stand ready to serve as a resource to you and your staff as you examine implementation strategies and regulatory policy.

As HHS works to define an essential benefits package, as set forth in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA), we hope that you will consider inclusion of hearing care for the more than 31 million Americans who experience some form of hearing loss, a number expected to rise to 78 million by 2030. As the Baby Boomer population ages, these individuals need guaranteed access to audiologists so that they remain productive members of our society, and avoid the negative consequences of untreated hearing loss.

As part of the essential benefits package, we would urge you to include direct access to audiology professionals who provide vital diagnostic and treatment services for those with hearing loss and balance disorders. Hearing loss, if left untreated, can lead to loss of income, and also social isolation and depression, and can affect the safety and emotional well-being of those who experience it. Likewise, those who suffer the devastating effects of balance problems are at risk for chronic disability, loss of work days and recurrent medical visits. By ensuring regular hearing and balance screenings and, therefore earlier diagnosis and treatment, a greater number of Americans will be able to enjoy greater physical and mental health, and the quality of life that they deserve.

Finally, we encourage you to include hearing services among those benefits essential to our pediatric patients. Regular hearing screening can result in early identification of hearing loss, and when the loss is detected early, steps can be taken to minimize the educational challenges these children face, such as delayed speech and language development and reading skills. It is estimated that, without early intervention, the average cost of special education services from grades K through 12 is approximately \$380,000 per child.

The Academy thanks you for your consideration of hearing and balance services for inclusion in the essential benefits package. We stand together with the Department of Health and Human Services in your continued efforts to ensure high quality health care for all beneficiaries. Additional details regarding audiology services will be forthcoming, and we would be pleased to have the opportunity to personally meet with you or your staff to further discuss these matters. Please contact Melissa Sinden, senior director of government relations, at 202-544-9335, or by email, msinden@audiology.org, if you should need additional information or clarification regarding the Academy's comments, or to schedule a meeting.

Sincerely,



Patricia B. Kricos, PhD
President
American Academy of Audiology