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February 9, 2023

The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

On behalf of the American Academy of Audiology, the largest organization of, by, and for, audiologists, I am reaching out to highlight the critical role audiologists play in providing hearing health-care services. In your recent State of the Union Address, you highlighted efforts of the Administration to expand the options available to adults with the introduction of over-the-counter (OTC) hearing aids.

While hearing aids can be invaluable tools in the provision of hearing care, hearing health care is a continuum, not limited to a single treatment approach. Hearing loss is highly individualized taking into account not simply volume but also pitch, sound patterns, and lifestyle/living environment. Audiologists, as the primary hearing health-care professionals, are uniquely situated to assist patients in appropriate treatment planning, navigating the wide array of treatments and device options to maximize the overall benefit and prevent unnecessary expenditures on options that may not be effective for their type and degree of hearing loss.

While access to OTC hearing aids diversifies access to devices, inequity in the delivery of hearing care remains a significant issue for the American public. Specifically, Medicare does not allow full direct access to the care of an audiologist for the population that arguably needs it most. The Academy continues to support increased access to hearing health care in all its forms, so we strongly support modernization of Medicare's outdated treatment of audiology services and to remove barriers for the nation's seniors who desperately need the services of audiologists in assessing and treating their hearing and balance-related difficulties.

The Academy and its dedicated audiologist members stand ready to work and partner with the Administration to highlight the prevalence of hearing loss and its associated comorbidities and expand access to audiology services. We also ask for the support of the Administration in helping Americans to embrace hearing health care in all its forms. Promoting only one option and limiting access to audiology services jeopardizes the welfare of those consumers who may be hesitant to seek out the necessary services of health-care professionals. We would welcome the opportunity to elaborate further on these comments and the importance of greater recognition by Medicare for audiology services.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to the Academy for any further dialogue or discussion on this critically important topic.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patrick E. Gallagher".

Patrick E. Gallagher, MBA
Executive Director