

Audiology Advocate

March 2025

Every year, legislative and regulatory developments at both the federal and state levels affect audiology and hearing-health care. This quarterly newsletter provides a concise overview of key updates and issues you need to know, along with upcoming events of interest.

Federal Updates

A New Presidential Administration and Congress Begin

On January 20, Donald Trump was sworn in as the 47th President of the United States. With a Republican majority in Congress, lawmakers began advancing his agenda, including confirming cabinet nominees and prioritizing legislative initiatives.

On his first day in office, President Trump signed several executive orders, including one rescinding a Biden-era directive to test Medicare and Medicaid models aimed at lowering health-care costs. Another executive order withdrew the United States from the World Health Organization (WHO), signaling a shift in the administration's approach to global health policy.

Meanwhile, the 119th Congress was also sworn in, setting the stage for legislative action. Representative Mike Johnson (R-LA) was elected Speaker of the House and Senator John Thune (R-SD) assumed the role of Majority Leader in the Senate. As new leadership took shape, the Academy engaged with freshman members in both chambers to discuss key health-care priorities and legislative opportunities in the new Congress.

Executive Order Freezes NIH Among Other Federal Agencies

President Trump signed an executive order halting operations at several federal agencies, including the National Institutes of Health (NIH). As a result, grant reviews and council meetings have been canceled, NIH leadership is under review for potential dismissal, programs have been removed from the agency's website, and all new awards—even those previously approved by the council—have been frozen.

The NIH, the world's leading research entity, funds nearly 50,000 competitive research grants and supports over 300,000 scientists and research personnel at more than 2,500 institutions. Within the NIH, the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD) focuses on critical areas such as inner ear protection, noise-induced hearing loss, ototoxicity, hair cell regeneration, and the central auditory system. NIDCD's research advances rehabilitative technologies and strategies, leading to

improved prevention, treatment, and management of hearing loss, tinnitus, and dizziness, with farreaching implications for patients and the audiology profession.

Kennedy Confirmed as Secretary of HHS: Other Nominations in the Queue

In late January, Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., an environmental lawyer and son of former Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, began his confirmation hearings for secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS). President Trump nominated Kennedy for the position after he ended his presidential bid and endorsed Trump.

Kennedy, who does not have a medical or public health background, faced opposition from both Democrats and Republicans due to his controversial views on vaccines, abortion, environmental regulation, food production, and drug legalization. In February, the U.S. Senate confirmed Robert F. Kennedy Jr. as secretary of HHS. The following cabinet positions still need to be confirmed:

Dave Weldon, MD, a former Florida representative and physician, has been nominated as the Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

Mehmet Oz, MD, has been nominated as administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. Dr. Oz is a celebrity physician who lost to John Fetterman in a 2022 race to represent Pennsylvania in the Senate.

Jay Bhattacharya, MD, a professor of medicine at Stanford University and research associate at the National Bureau of Economic Research, has been nominated as Director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). In March, Dr. Bhattacharya started his confirmation process by testifying before the U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee.

Medicare Audiologist Access Improvement Act

There is currently no set timeline for the reintroduction of the Medicare Audiology Access Improvement Act (MAAIA) due to other pressing congressional priorities. However, we do have some key updates on its progress.

In the House, Representative Gus Bilirakis (R-FL) will once again lead the bill, with Representative Kevin Mullin (D-CA) joining as the new Democratic lead. Representative Mullin, who has personal experience with hearing loss, is eager to support the legislation.

In the Senate, Senators Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) and Rand Paul (R-KY) will continue as lead sponsors. While Chuck Grassley (R-IA) has indicated that other priorities prevent him from taking a lead role at this time, he will serve as an original cosponsor.

Congress Considers H.R. 879 to Stabilize Medicare Payments

On January 1, a 2.83 percent reduction in Medicare payments took effect, placing additional financial strain on providers already dealing with rising costs. Without Congressional action, these cuts-combined with a 3.6 percent increase in practice expenses-could result in an unsustainable 6.43 percent reduction in reimbursement.

To address this, Representative Gregory Murphy (R-NC) has introduced H.R. 879, the Medicare Patient Access and Practice Stabilization Act, which would restore 6.62 percent to the Medicare Physician Fee Schedule, reversing these cuts and stabilizing provider payments. Without this relief, many health-care

professionals may be forced to reduce services, limit Medicare patient access, or even shut down their practices-jeopardizing care for millions of seniors and individuals with disabilities.

House Passes Continuing Resolution and All Eyes on the Senate

On March 11, 2025, the House of Representatives passed a seven-month continuing resolution (CR) to avoid a government shutdown. The CR will fund government operations through the remainder of the fiscal year (September 30) and will slash non-defense spending by roughly \$13 billion and increase defense spending by about \$6 billion over current budgets. The CR will also extend telehealth rules in Medicare that were eased during the pandemic through September 30, though it stops short of permanent or longer-term extension. However, it does not include the provider fix that many were expecting it to contain. The doctors caucus in the House of Representatives was given assurances that the provider fix would be in the reconciliation bill that the Republicans hope to pass before Memorial Day.

The House adjourned for the rest of the week, and now the Senate must pass this bill to keep the government from shutting down by Friday at midnight.

The Academy will continue to work with influencers and our champions in Congress to push for the provider fix and our Medicare Audiology Access Improvement Act legislation.

State Updates

Audiology Scope Expansion Bills Gain Momentum in 2025

Following the passage of Maryland's SB 795 (2024) last year, several states have introduced similar legislation to modernize audiology practice laws. This year, Maryland, Oregon, and Arkansas have advanced bills that expand the scope of practice for audiologists, all of which allow them to conduct health screenings, order imaging, order bloodwork, and remove cerumen from the ear canal. These legislative efforts seek to ensure that audiologists can fully utilize their clinical expertise and improve patient access to essential hearing and balance care while maintaining appropriate safeguards.

Maryland SB 919/HB1298

This legislation builds upon the previous scope expansion by clarifying audiologists' ability to order and perform in-office, non-radiographic imaging and conduct health screenings related to hearing. These bills held hearings at the end of February and early March, where the Academy submitted a letter of support to the committee.

Oregon SB 943

Last summer, the Oregon Academy of Audiology (OM) approached the Academy with draft legislation aimed at updating audiology regulations. The proposed language incorporated key elements from Maryland's previous legislation and included provisions requiring the board to recognize ACAE accreditation for licensure. The Academy provided feedback to OM during the drafting process and, once the bill was scheduled for a hearing, submitted a letter of support. As the bill progresses through the legislative process, the Academy remains committed to advocating for its passage.

Arkansas SB 118

In addition to providing written support for the bill, the Academy worked directly with the lead witness, assisting in the preparation of her oral testimony before the Senate. As the bill now moves to the House, the

Academy is continuing to provide guidance, helping draft testimony for the new witness. These efforts are part of the Academy's broader strategy to ensure that audiologists in Arkansas have the tools and legislative backing necessary to provide comprehensive hearing and balance care.

Across all three states, the Academy has supported these scope expansion bills by submitting letters of endorsement, engaging with bill sponsors, and coordinating with state audiology organizations to advocate for policies that best serve audiologists and their patients. With momentum growing nationwide, the Academy remains committed to advancing legislation that modernizes audiology practice and enhances access to high-quality hearing-health care.

Hearing Instrument Specialists Seek Expansions of Scope of Practice Hearing Instrument Specialists (HIS) are pushing to expand their scope of practice in both Nebraska and Nevada, with proposals that would lower educational requirements and allow new services under their scope of practice, specifically tinnitus care and cerumen management. However, the Academy is strongly opposing these initiatives, citing concerns over patient safety and the qualifications necessary for such procedures.

Nebraska LB 154

The Academy opposed this bill by working with members in Nebraska to testify in opposition at the bill hearing. Additionally, the Academy directly engaged committee members through email to advocate for maintaining high standards in hearing-health care. While the legislation has not advanced, Nebraska's legislative session continues until June, and the Academy continues to monitor developments. Notably, Nebraska has a unicameral legislature, meaning the bill does not require passage through multiple chambers to become law.

Nevada Assembly Bill 177

Introduced in February and heard later that month, Nevada's bill closely mirrors Nebraska's legislation. The Academy submitted a letter highlighting concerns about expanding the HIS scope without adequate training and oversight. To further advocacy efforts, the Academy launched a grassroots messaging campaign, allowing Nevada members to directly engage with their representatives and urge them to oppose the bill to uphold patient safety and maintain standards in hearing healthcare.

The Academy continues to emphasize the importance of preserving high standards in hearing-health care. Audiologists, with their doctoral-level education and specialized clinical training, are uniquely qualified to address complex hearing and balance disorders. As these bills progress, the Academy will continue to advocate for patient safety and the integrity of the audiology profession, ensuring that individuals receive the best possible care from properly trained professionals.

Advancing Interstate Practice: ASLP-IC Compact Update

The Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology Interstate Compact (ASLP-IC) is designed to streamline the licensure process for audiologists by allowing practice across state lines without needing separate state-specific licenses. The compact is currently working to become operational with its data system.

SPAN Addresses the ASLP-IC

As part of the Academy's ongoing efforts to support the ASLP-IC, the State Policy Advocacy Network (SPAN) met earlier this year. This newly formed group, a reimagined version of the State Leaders network, provides a platform for advocacy and education on state-level policy issues. At this meeting, we were pleased

to host representatives from the ASLP-IC Commission, who provided a comprehensive presentation on the compact and answered critical questions from audiologists. The presentation was informative, offering much-needed clarity on several legal questions that had been lingering and helping our members better understand the compact's implications.

CompactConnect Onboarding

The Academy participated in the CompactConnect Onboarding Webinar, which outlined key steps for states joining the ASLP-IC, such as configuring licensure systems and setting state-specific fees. The session provided guidance on data submission, managing licensee records, and background checks. Although aimed at state officials, it offered useful insights for audiologists, including the need for some states to establish background check systems before full implementation. The ASLP-IC is targeting an August 2025 soft launch, and the Academy will continue to keep members informed about these important updates.

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