



September 8, 2021

The Honorable Richard Neal  
Chairman  
Committee on Ways and Means  
1102 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin Brady  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Ways and Means  
1139 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington D.C. 20515

Chairman Neal and Ranking Member Brady:

We write to share our support for provisions in Part 4 of Subtitle E of the Committee's reconciliation measure that will expand access to hearing health care and recognize the critical role of the audiologist in providing needed services and supports to Medicare beneficiaries.

Audiologists are licensed health care professionals who provide expert hearing and balance care to individuals of all ages. Medicare, however, currently prevents beneficiaries from accessing audiologic care in a timely and robust manner by limiting reimbursement to diagnostic services, and then only after the beneficiary obtains an order for such services, even though treatment services are covered by Medicare when furnished by physicians or other providers. These arbitrary restrictions unfairly preclude beneficiaries from obtaining care available to most individuals through other programs and payers, while resulting in unnecessary out-of-pocket costs for seniors, many of whom live on fixed incomes.

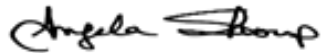
Our organizations are pleased that section 134402 addresses these issues in part by enabling beneficiaries to apply Medicare coverage to both diagnostic and treatment services delivered by audiologists, and by reclassifying audiologists as practitioners under Medicare so that they can be more efficiently utilized within the Medicare system. Although we understand the constraints of the reconciliation process, we are disappointed that this section does not provide beneficiaries with direct access to audiologic care, and encourage the committee to include section 3(b) of H.R. 1587, the Medicare Audiologist Access and Services Act, in the committee's legislation prior to House consideration of the bill, to the extent permissible under the rules.

Removing the physician order requirement will streamline beneficiary access to hearing health care, reducing duplicative services and delays in treatment, while lowering consumer costs for unnecessary visits to physicians. This provision, in conjunction with enhancing and integrating the role of audiologists in Medicare, will ensure that new benefits such as coverage of hearing aids will result in optimal functional outcomes for beneficiaries and the best return on the investment of taxpayer resources.

The committee recognized the value of providing beneficiaries direct access to audiologic care by including language empowering the Secretary of Health and Human Services to remove the physician order requirement in Section 602 of H.R. 3, the Elijah E. Cummings Lower Drug Costs Now Act, which the committee approved, and the House passed in the 116th Congress. We would be happy to discuss the importance of streamlining beneficiary access to care provided by audiologists with you and your staff at your convenience as this legislation moves forward.

Thank you and your staff for your efforts to improve the hearing health of America's seniors. We look forward to continued collaboration to improve Medicare beneficiary access to the full range of diagnostic and treatment services provided by audiologists.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Angela Shoup". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A'.

Angela Shoup, PhD  
President, American Academy of Audiology

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "A. Lynn Williams". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A'.

A. Lynn Williams, PhD, CCC-CLP  
President, American Speech-Language-Hearing Association

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Victor Bray". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'V'.

Victor Bray, PhD  
President, Academy of Doctors of Audiology