



The Nation's Voice for People with Hearing Loss

The Honorable Tom Rice
The Honorable Lynn Jenkins
The Honorable Matt Cartwright
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515
August 28, 2017

Re: Audiology Patient Choice Act of 2017, HR 2276

Dear Mr. Rice, Ms. Jenkins and Mr. Cartwright:

The Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA), the nation's leading organization representing people with hearing loss, supports the Audiology Patient Choice Act of 2017 (H.R. 2276). We thank you for introducing this legislation, which if enacted will remove unnecessary barriers to hearing care for millions of older Americans.

According to a recent report from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), hearing loss is the third-most common chronic physical condition among older adults in the United States after hypertension and arthritis, and is twice as likely to occur as diabetes or cancer. Ten thousand Americans turn age 65 years every day, and will continue to do so until 2030. Unfortunately, these Medicare-eligible patients who need hearing health care services must endure the most red tape to get the help that they need.

Today, Medicare patients are required to get a physician order before Medicare will cover a diagnostic evaluation from a licensed audiologist. This requirement runs counter to best practices in hearing health care delivery exemplified by other federal programs, such as the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the Federal Employees Health Benefits program, as well as most private health insurance and Medicare Advantage plans, which encourage patients to seek treatment **directly** from audiologists.

In addition, Medicare patients must either consent to being shuffled from provider to provider for the Medicare-covered audiology services they need, or they have to pay out-of-pocket for one-stop access to the same services when delivered by a licensed, qualified provider.

The Audiology Patient Choice Act will make much needed improvements to existing Medicare regulations. Audiologists diagnose and treat hearing and balance disorders that cannot be managed with surgical or pharmacological intervention. For older adults, these types of conditions account for more than 90 percent of hearing loss. Medicare patients should have the right to choose the most efficient pathway to care. Medicare should allow for reimbursement for covered services that are delivered by audiologists.



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We thank you for sponsoring the Audiology Patient Choice Act so that Medicare patients have better access to safe, effective, efficient audiology services.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Barbara Kelley".

Barbara Kelley
Executive Director