

The Medicare Audiologist Access and Services Act of 2021

H.R. 1587

Introduced by Representatives Tom Rice (R-SC) and Matt Cartwright (D-PA), with more than 20 bipartisan original co-sponsors, this legislation will enhance the Medicare benefit by providing critical direct access to both diagnostic and therapeutic services provided by audiologists.

The American Academy of Audiology (AAA), Academy of Doctors of Audiology (ADA), and the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) endorse this legislation as a top priority to ensure expedient and optimal hearing and balance health care for the older adult population in the United States.

Outdated Medicare rules have created barriers to care and are far more restrictive than many private and federal insurance plans including Medicare Advantage, VA health coverage and the Federal Employees Health Benefit Plan. Medicare currently does not recognize audiologists as providers of most hearing-related services and will only allow reimbursement for a narrow set of tests to diagnose a hearing or balance disorder—and only if patients first obtain an order from a physician.

H.R. 1587 would provide a commonsense solution to modernize Medicare regulations to ensure beneficiaries have access to a full range of hearing and balance health care services provided by licensed audiologists. The bill would:

- Classify audiologists as “practitioners,”-- consistent with how Medicare treats similar allied health care professionals-- such as clinical social workers and clinical psychologists

- Remove the physician order requirement, which does not exist with any other federal or commercial payer

- Allow audiologists to provide and be reimbursed for diagnostic and treatment services

- Make no changes to the current scope of Medicare hearing health benefits or the scope of practice of audiologists