ENHANCE MEDICARE ACCESS TO AUDIOLOGY SERVICES
MODERNIZE MEDICARE POLICY TO IMPROVE BENEFICIARY ACCESS & OUTCOMES

ACTION REQUESTED

Improve Medicare beneficiaries’ access to balance and hearing health care services by appropriately recognizing audiologists as independent practitioners who can perform both diagnostic and treatment services within their established scope of practice.

ISSUE: Medicare Does Not Provide Comprehensive Coverage for Audiology Services

Medicare only covers diagnostic tests performed by audiologists to assess hearing and balance when ordered by a physician.

- The National Academy of Sciences issued a report, “Hearing Health Care for Adults: Priorities for Improving Access and Affordability,” which recommended Medicare coverage of audiologic treatment.¹
- Audiologists’ scope of practice includes auditory and vestibular treatment and neurological monitoring.
- Timely access to diagnosis and treatment for hearing and vestibular conditions can improve outcomes for beneficiaries and reduce overall cost of care because of enhanced compliance and communication.
- Administrative requirements for referral and oversight unnecessarily delay care and increase costs.
- Untreated hearing loss can lead to depression, anxiety, and emotional instability.²
- Most private health plans allow for direct access to audiology services, which is consistent with state laws.
- Vestibular and audiologic treatments (within an audiologist’s scope of practice under state law) are services currently covered under Medicare benefits when provided by other practitioners.

SOLUTION: Improve Beneficiary Access to Audiology Services by Recognizing Audiologists as Independent Practitioners Who Can Provide Treatment and Diagnostic Services Under Medicare

- Expand coverage to include all Medicare covered diagnostic and treatment services that correspond to audiology’s scope of practice.
- Allow for direct access to audiology services by removing language requiring a physician referral.
- Reclassify audiologists from “supplier” to “practitioner” to better recognize the role audiologists play in providing hearing health care services.