ENHANCE OLDER ADULT ACCESS TO TELEHEALTH SERVICES
MODERNIZE MEDICARE POLICY TO IMPROVE BENEFICIARY ACCESS & OUTCOMES

ACTION REQUESTED

Improve Medicare beneficiaries’ access to audiology and speech-language pathology services by covering services delivered via telehealth.

ISSUE: Medicare Does Not Cover Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology Services Delivered Via Telehealth.

Audiologists and speech-language pathologists (SLPs) are qualified providers of telehealth services and are often allowed to provide telehealth services under state law and other payer policies.

- Covering telehealth would enhance access to hearing, swallowing, and cognition related health care services to Medicare beneficiaries in rural and medically under-served areas.¹
- Increasing access to audiology and speech-language pathology services may help consumers to better understand their health care condition and help their ability to express their medical need resulting in increased compliance and improved patient outcomes.²
- Twenty states have licensure laws that authorize audiologists and SLPs to perform services via telehealth; no states have enacted prohibitions on telehealth.
- Expanding telehealth coverage to these professions would have a minor effect on Medicare spending. An independent cost estimate found that covering audiology and speech-language pathology services under Medicare would increase fiscal year outlays by less than $2.5 million over the 5-year budget period and less than $10 million over 10 years.
- Private insurers in 30 states have established policies that allow audiologists and SLPs to provide services via telehealth.
- Medicaid programs in 27 states authorize audiologists and SLPs to provide services via telehealth.
- A 2016 survey noted, 67% of adults ages 65 and older say they go online.³

SOLUTION: Expand Medicare Beneficiaries’ Access to Telehealth Services Delivered by Audiologists and SLPs in Any Comprehensive Telehealth Legislation.

- Include audiologists, SLPs, and other therapy professions as eligible providers under Medicare Part B.
- Lift restrictions on the use of telehealth by audiologists, SLPs, and other therapy professions in Accountable Care Organizations and Medicare Advantage.
- Require CMS to test global and bundled payment arrangements that promote access to telehealth services.