The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) is the national professional, scientific, and credentialing association for 198,000 members and affiliates who are audiologists; speech-language pathologists; speech, language, and hearing scientists; audiology and speech-language pathology support personnel; and students.
The vision of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) is “making effective communication, a human right, accessible and achievable for all.” ASHA works in part to achieve this vision by empowering and supporting our members to advocate for the professions and the patients, clients, and students we serve.

ASHA’s Government Relations and Public Policy Board is pleased to present the 2019 Public Policy Agenda. Developed for ASHA members, lawmakers, policymakers, decision makers, and consumers, this resource identifies the top public policy priorities for the professions of audiology and speech-language pathology, and serves as the foundational guide for ASHA’s advocacy efforts in the year to come.

Audiologists and speech-language pathologists are the leading professionals uniquely trained to assess and treat communication disorders, which impact over 40 million Americans. As we continue to live in a time marked by considerable political uncertainty, growing ideological and socioeconomic division, and tightened budgets, it remains of utmost importance that the value of audiology and speech-language pathology services in all settings is properly understood and reflected in relevant laws and regulations.

The 2019 Public Policy Agenda reflects ASHA’s ongoing commitment to patients, clients, and students, evidence-based practice and outcomes, the highest standards of professional ethics, a diverse professional workforce, and nondiscrimination across the full range of dimensions of diversity, including but not limited to: age, disability, ethnicity, gender identity, national origin, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, and veteran status.

ASHA looks forward to working collaboratively with lawmakers, policymakers, decision makers, and allied stakeholders to advance the public policy priorities in the 2019 Public Policy Agenda.

Jeffrey P. Regan
Director of Government Affairs and Public Policy
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YOU MAKE A DIFFERENCE

I'M HERE SUPPORTING
Medicare for Telehealth & Higher Education Funding

I'M HERE SUPPORTING
Medicare Coverage of Audiology Services
As the leading voice for audiology and speech-language pathology, ASHA has made unmatched investments in its advocacy capabilities. ASHA employs a team of 20 government affairs and public policy professionals who proactively and collaboratively advance the priorities of the annual Public Policy Agenda by

- undertaking robust public policy analysis and development;
- building and leveraging strategic relationships with influential lawmakers and policymakers;
- communicating regularly with ASHA members, lawmakers, policymakers, other decision makers, allied stakeholders, consumers, and the general public; and
- facilitating opportunities for ASHA members to advocate.

ASHA member participation in advocacy is critical to our success!

As a member of ASHA, you have a very important voice. The professional perspectives and personal stories you bring to public policy issues have a powerful impact on our collective ability to advance the professions.

By working together, we can most effectively educate, inform, and persuade lawmakers, policymakers, and other decision makers to take action that benefits not only our members but also the patients, clients, and students we serve.

There are a number of ways to get involved:

- Follow **ASHA Advocacy** on social media:
  - www.Facebook.com/AshaAdvocacy
  - www.Twitter.com/ASHAAdvocacy
  - www.Pinterest.com/ashaweb/Asha-Advocacy
- Sign up for **ASHA Headlines** at www.asha.org/Publications/ASHA-Headlines to receive the 60-Second Advocacy Update.
- Take action at takeaction.asha.org on ASHA’s advocacy issues.
- Learn about **ASHA-PAC** at www.asha.org/Advocacy/pac.
HEALTH CARE ISSUES

Audiologists and speech-language pathologists provide medically necessary services that result in positive health outcomes and an enhanced quality of life. It is essential that audiology and speech-language pathology services are comprehensively covered and equitably reimbursed by public and private payers.

PRIORITIES

- Advocate for the inclusion of audiology and speech-language pathology services in alternative payment models and other emerging health care delivery systems.
- Advocate for comprehensive coverage and equitable reimbursement of audiology and speech-language pathology services—including, but not limited to, early intervention and telepractice—by Medicare, Medicaid, and third party payers.
- Advocate for public policies that streamline documentation while maintaining high-quality care.
- Maintain the coverage of habilitation and rehabilitation services and devices as essential health benefits.
- Advocate for productivity standards that ensure both clinical excellence and ethical practice.

Nearly 60 million people are covered by Medicare; 33% of Medicare beneficiaries are covered under a Medicare Advantage plan.¹

Approximately 73.4 million individuals were enrolled in Medicaid and CHIP in 2018.²

Habilitation/rehabilitation, as an essential health benefit, only represent 2% of the premium, but their removal would lead to large cost increases for people who need this type of care ($2,247).³
In 2014, the most prevalent disability category of children ages 3 through 5 served under IDEA, Part B, was speech or language impairments (43.7%). Speech or language impairments was the second or third most prevalent category for students ages 6 through 21 in every racial/ethnic group.  

In 2017, $13 billion was spent on special education and related services under IDEA; federal resources devoted to children are expected to drop from 9.4% to 6.9% over the next decade.  

SCHOOLS ISSUES

Audiologists and speech-language pathologists provide critical evidence-based services to students with disabilities. These services build effective communication skills and facilitate academic achievement. It is essential that all students have meaningful access to appropriately resourced audiology and speech-language pathology services, and that all parents have the ability to make informed choices about the education of their children.

PRIORITIES

- Advocate for public policies that reduce caseload and workload burdens on school-based audiologists and speech-language pathologists to ensure both clinical excellence and ethical practice.
- Advocate for public policies that streamline documentation.
- Advocate for increased funding for audiology and speech-language pathology services—including, but not limited to, early intervention and telepractice—under the Individuals with Disabilities Act, the Every Student Succeeds Act, and Medicaid.
- Preserve the current roles of the federal and state governments in setting education policy and standards that improve service quality and student outcomes.
Nearly three quarters of audiologists (73.7%) are employed in health care settings; 15.3% are employed in educational settings.6

More than half of SLPs (54.6%) are employed in educational settings, including 51.8% in schools; an additional 39.2% are employed in health care settings.7

Nationwide, there are 4 audiologists for every 100,000 residents and 51 SLPs for every 100,000 residents.8
PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE AND WORKFORCE ISSUES

Audiologists and speech-language pathologists are the leading professionals uniquely trained to assess and treat communication disorders. It is essential that licensure and certification requirements for the professions are preserved, the professions’ defined scopes of practice are protected, a robust graduate and undergraduate student pipeline is supported, and workplace safety is promoted.

PRIORITIES

• Advocate for public policies that promote appropriate education, regulation, and utilization of audiology and speech-language pathology assistants.

• Foster adoption of interstate licensure compact for audiology and speech-language pathology.

• Respond to infringement upon the scopes of practice of audiology and speech-language pathology by other professions that lack the appropriate academic and clinical preparation to assess, treat, or manage speech, language, cognitive, hearing, voice and balance, or feeding/swallowing disorders.

• Advocate for public policies that maintain the independence of state licensing boards, that exempt audiologists and speech-language pathologists from burdensome occupational licensing review requirements, and that preserve the autonomy of independent, nationally recognized professional certification.

• Advocate for public policies that promote comprehensive state licensure of audiologists and speech-language pathologists, including clinical fellows.

• Advocate for public policies that support a robust pipeline of graduate and undergraduate students in audiology and speech-language pathology programs—including, but not limited to, access to financial assistance programs, current programmatic accreditation standards, and supervision standards.

• Advocate for evidence-based public policies that strengthen workplace safety.
40 million Americans have communication disorders, costing the U.S. approximately $154–186 billion annually.⁹

6–8 million Americans have some form of language impairment.¹⁰

Approximately 36 million Americans have some degree of hearing loss.¹¹
Effectively assessing and treating communication disorders is determined by the individual needs of each patient, client, or student. It is essential that public policies (a) are structured to support individuals with communication disorders and (b) ensure that those individuals have meaningful access to the evidence-based care they require.

PRIORITIES

- Promote **audiological health care services;** safe devices for habilitation, rehabilitation, and prevention; and safe hearing environments.
- Advocate for public policies ensuring that appropriate assessments, services, funding, and informed choice exist to meet the individual needs of patients, clients, or students with speech, language, cognitive, hearing, voice and balance, or feeding/swallowing disorders.
- Participate in **international public policy initiatives** designed to support individuals with speech, language, cognitive, hearing, voice and balance, or feeding/swallowing disorders.
- Advocate for states to comply with service mandates under Medicaid’s Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment (EPSDT) program.
- Oppose policies that seek to limit eligibility and access to Medicaid services through administrative restrictions.
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SOURCES
7 Ibid.