**Medicare Coverage of Audiology Services**

### Action

Ask your members of Congress to support H.R. 1116, the Medicare Audiology Services Enhancement Act of 2015, legislation that would provide senior citizens with a Medicare audiology benefit that gives them access to both diagnostic and treatment services provided by audiologists.

### Background

Currently, Medicare only covers diagnostic tests performed by audiologists to assess hearing and balance. Under the proposed legislation, covered services provided by audiologists would be expanded to include auditory treatment and vestibular treatment. In addition, the proposal would allow direct payment of intraoperative neurophysiologic monitoring (IONM) performed by audiologists in the hospital inpatient setting. All of these services are currently covered under Medicare when provided by other practitioners.

The Medicare Audiology Services Enhancement Act of 2015 would continue to exclude services provided in the dispensing of a hearing aid and would maintain the long-standing Medicare requirement for a physician referral. Audiologists would still maintain the ability to use their clinical judgment and expertise when treating a patient. The audiologist, after examining the patient, would develop a plan of care (required by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services for all providers performing treatment services) tailored to that individual and share this information with the treating physician to facilitate overall care coordination of the patient. Audiologists can choose to be either participating or nonparticipating providers, but cannot opt-out of the Medicare program.

As Medicare moves to alternative payment models, and reimbursement based on patient outcomes, it will become more difficult for audiologists to receive full reimbursement under value-based purchasing if they are not recognized to both diagnose and treat patients. Recognizing audiologists to provide both diagnostic and audiologic treatment services will offer better reporting and measurement of the value of audiology services for Medicare beneficiaries with hearing health care needs.

The cost associated with this legislation would have a nominal impact on the overall spending for Medicare. An independent cost estimate found that the proposed changes would increase fiscal year outlays by less than $7 million over the 5-year budget period and less than $18 million over 10-years. The bill applies to services currently covered under the Medicare program that are within an audiologist’s scope of practice, as allowed by state licensure, and would not add any new services to the Medicare program. Comprehensive coverage for audiologic treatment services provided by audiologists will enable Medicare beneficiaries to enjoy greater access to services that address their hearing and balance-related health care needs.

In June 2016, the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine issued a report entitled “Hearing Health Care for Adults: Priorities for Improving Access and Affordability”, which recommends Medicare coverage of audiology services. The study also supports the need for development and implementation of quality metrics to improve patient-centered outcomes. This legislation is supported by the American Academy of Otolaryngology–Head and Neck Surgery in the 114th Congress.