

2023 FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

Reforming Prior Authorization to Improve Patient Access to Care

Prior authorization is a process created by health insurance companies that requires physicians to obtain approval before providing care to patients for covered services. This burdensome process increases the time required for a physician to diagnose and treat a patient — delaying the patient’s access to care and potentially putting their health at risk.

In the 117th Congress, the AAO-HNS and over 500 other organizations endorsed the bipartisan *Improving Seniors’ Timely Access to Care Act*, which would have provided critical reforms to the prior authorization process under the Medicare Advantage program. Specifically, the bill would have required that insurers provide:

- More transparency on the list of treatments that are subject to prior authorization requirements
- The average time these approvals take
- The extent to which these approvals are accepted and denied

Last year, the bill passed on a voice vote in the U.S. House of Representatives and garnered the support of 52 cosponsors in the U.S. Senate. **This year, the AAO-HNS is advocating for reintroduction and passage of this much-needed legislation to protect patients’ access to care and help relieve physicians’ administrative burden.**

Championing Fair Medicare Reimbursement for Physicians

For more than twenty years, the Medicare payment system has failed to keep up with inflation and physician services have been perennial targets for cuts. **In fact, from 2001 to 2023, Medicare physician payment has effectively been cut by 26 percent, when adjusted for inflation.** Furthermore, while Congress voted in December 2022 to provide some relief toward the scheduled 8.47 percent cut to Medicare payment for 2023, physicians still faced a 2 percent cut this year. These cuts endanger Medicare beneficiaries’ access to care and create financial instability for physician practices.

Recognizing the need to act on this issue, Reps. Raul Ruiz, MD (D-CA), Larry Bucshon, MD (R-IN), Ami Bera, MD (D-CA) and Mariannette Miller-Meeks, MD (R-IA) introduced the *Strengthening Medicare for Patients and Providers Act* (H.R. 2474). This bill would tie Medicare payments to the Medicare Economic Index, a common measure of inflation, and provide much-needed financial stability for physician practices.

The AAO-HNS strongly urges Members of Congress to cosponsor H.R. 2474 and help fix Medicare’s broken physician payment system.



AMERICAN ACADEMY OF
OTOLARYNGOLOGY-
HEAD AND NECK SURGERY®

Ensuring Patient Safety for Hearing Healthcare

The AAO-HNS believes that a physician-led hearing healthcare team, with coordination of services, is the best approach for providing the highest quality care to patients. Unfortunately, the audiology community continues to pursue legislation that would undermine the overall hearing healthcare team by removing existing physician referral requirements and granting audiologists “direct access” to Medicare beneficiaries.

We firmly oppose any legislation that would allow audiologists to independently diagnose or treat the medical conditions associated with hearing loss or balance disorders.

Promoting Critical Federal Research on Hearing and Balance Disorders

The National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD) — a division of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) — conducts critical research on hearing, balance, speech, language and other communication disorders. The NIDCD recently established a new Neurotology Branch within the Division of Intramural Research to oversee pioneering research on new therapies for disorders commonly treated by otolaryngologist-head and neck surgeons.

For fiscal year 2024, the AAO-HNS supports the President’s budget request of \$534.3 million in funding for the NIDCD.

For more information on federal legislative issues or specific legislation, please contact:

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