



Ensuring Patient Safety for Hearing Healthcare

We urge Congress to oppose the Medicare Audiologist Access Improvement Act (S. 2377/H.R. 6445), which would inappropriately expand the scope of practice of audiologists, reclassify them as providers under Medicare, and does not increase patient access. In short, the bill would put patients at risk by undermining physician-led team care.

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 granting audiologists “direct access” to Medicare beneficiaries.

Fundamentally, hearing and balance disorders are medical conditions that require a full patient history and physical examination by a physician. While audiologists are valued health professionals who work for and with physicians, they do not possess the medical training necessary to perform the same functions as physicians, nor are they able to provide patients with the medical diagnosis and treatment options they deserve. Audiologists are not physicians and should not be treated as such under the Medicare program.

With eight years of formal education, a minimum five-year residency and at least 15,000 hours of clinical training, otolaryngologist-head and neck surgeons are the most qualified providers to diagnose and treat ear, nose, and throat conditions - and are trained to lead a care team. A physician-led hearing care team, with coordination of services, is the best approach for providing the highest quality care to patients.



4 out of 5 patients prefer to receive care from a physician-led healthcare team

Source: July 2018 AMA Survey

For these reasons, the AAO-HNS strongly opposes the Medicare Audiologist Access Improvement Act (S. 2377/H.R. 6445). By allowing audiologists to independently diagnose and treat medical conditions, patients will ultimately be subjected to a lower standard of care, increased costs, and an increased risk of undiagnosed and untreated issues.

In the 117th Congress, lawmakers in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives introduced very similar legislation. That legislation was **opposed** by the AAO-HNS and 110 national, state and local medical organizations. In large part due to this opposition from the medical community, that legislation did not pass.

The AAO-HNS continues to firmly oppose any legislation that would allow audiologists to independently diagnose or treat the medical conditions associated with hearing loss or balance disorders.