

State Laws Prohibiting Audiologists from Providing Telehealth Services Must be Updated for Any Federal Improvements to Apply

It is important to note that even if Medicare laws are changed to allow audiologists to provide telehealth services, audiologists will not be able to do so if prohibited by state law. If your state does not allow audiologists to provide telehealth services, please work with your state audiology organization and/or independently to request an emergency policy change.



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March 27, 2020

Seema Verma
Administrator
Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services
7500 Security Boulevard
Baltimore, MD 21244

Dear Administrator Verma,

Thank you for all you are doing in response to the coronavirus pandemic. We appreciate all of your efforts to rapidly update and adjust Medicare policies to keep our country and its citizens safe and well served. As you know, the President declared a National Emergency under the National Emergencies Act on March 13, 2020, therefore allowing the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to issue Section 1135 waivers to temporarily or waive certain requirements of the Medicare program.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and leading health experts from the Administration's Coronavirus Task Force have demonstrated that social distancing can help prevent the spread of the coronavirus and all diseases such as the flu, which are similarly transmitted. Unfortunately, current Medicare policy with respect to hearing and balance health care encourages the exact opposite of social distancing for our most vulnerable citizens.

Current Medicare Part B policy requires beneficiaries to obtain a physician order before seeing an audiologist and also prohibits audiologists from providing services via telehealth. These requirements are inconsistent with evidence-based practices in the delivery and efficiency of care. The physician order requirement is unique to the Medicare Part B program only, even though audiologists are responsible for determining medical necessity. The Department of Defense, the Veterans Health Administration, and Federal Employees Health Benefit system plans do not require a physician order for beneficiary access to covered audiology services. Most private insurance plans and Medicare Advantage plans similarly allow direct access to audiologist services.

Therefore, we urge you to exercise your authority under Section 1135 to modify the requirements of the Medicare program to eliminate the physician order requirement for audiology services and to also allow audiologists to provide Medicare-covered services via telehealth.

Thank you in advance for your consideration. Please feel free to contact me at 330.495.0293 or dabel@audigy.com. Wishing you continued good health.

Sincerely,

Debbie Abel, Au.D., President

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