



June 21, 2019

SUBMITTED ELECTRONICALLY

The Honorable Chuck Grassley (IA)
U.S. Senate
Chair, Finance Committee
Washington, D.C. 20002

The Honorable Ron Wyden (OR)
U.S. Senate
Ranking Member, Finance Committee
Washington, D.C. 20002

Re: Pass Legislation to Restore Access to Manual CRT Wheelchair Accessories

Chairman Grassley and Ranking Member Wyden:

The undersigned members of the Independence Through Enhancement of Medicare and Medicaid (ITEM) Coalition **urge you to pass S. 1223, the Protecting Beneficiary Access to Complex Rehab Technology Act.** This bipartisan legislation sponsored by Senators Bob Casey (D-PA) and Rob Portman (R-OH) permanently exempts manual Complex Rehabilitation Technology (“CRT”) wheelchair accessories and components for people with disabilities and chronic conditions from Medicare’s Competitive Bid Program (CBP). This important legislation will protect Medicare beneficiary access to manual complex rehab technology, as well as essential components known as wheelchair “accessories.” This bill garnered strong bipartisan support in both the House and Senate in 2018, and in fact, passed the House before Congress adjourned without the Senate considering the bill. We urge you to pass this critical legislation in the 116th Congress to ensure Medicare beneficiary access to manual CRT wheelchairs and accessories.

On June 23, 2017, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) [announced](#) a policy clarification that it would not apply competitively-bid reimbursement levels to CRT Group 3 *power* wheelchair accessories. This policy averted significant cuts that were scheduled to go into effect July 1, 2017, and avoided drastic reductions in access to this specialized mobility technology for Medicare beneficiaries with significant, long-term mobility impairments. The ITEM Coalition is grateful to CMS and the Members of Congress that supported this action.

Unfortunately, CMS did not extend this new rule to CRT *manual* wheelchairs, making a legislative fix necessary to preserve beneficiary access to these critical CRT accessories and components in manual wheelchairs. Now, we are asking you to pass S. 1223, which would address this policy imbalance.

Congressional action is urgently needed to permanently help Medicare beneficiaries who are manual CRT wheelchair users to obtain medically necessary CRT accessories and components.

The decision by CMS to not extend CRT patient protections to manual CRT wheelchairs and accessories has led to a significant disparity in access. This adversely impacts Medicare beneficiaries with mobility impairments by unfairly penalizing manual CRT wheelchair users, limiting their access to essential wheelchair accessories and components. The impact of this decision is apparently playing out in real time.

Data from a recent survey of over 400 Medicare supplier locations¹ shows that nearly two-thirds of respondents indicated the reimbursement cuts to manual CRT wheelchair accessories have “significantly reduced [their] ability to provide the right wheelchair accessories to Medicare beneficiaries who require Complex Rehab Manual Wheelchairs.” A decrease in access to manual CRT wheelchair accessories would be detrimental to many wheelchair users that rely on Medicare to provide these essential components.

To ensure that all CRT wheelchair users, both power and manual, have access to the components they need, we urge you to pass S. 1223. We are writing to express our strong support for this legislation and to emphasize the importance of protecting patient access not just to accessories used with complex rehab *power* wheelchairs, but also to those used with complex rehab *manual* wheelchairs. Passage of S. 1223 is supported by a wide range of consumer and provider organizations, including the undersigned members of the ITEM Coalition.

Regardless of injury, illness, disability, or chronic condition, all Medicare beneficiaries with mobility impairments should be eligible for the same access to medically necessary mobility devices, services, and accessories. Anything less can have serious consequences for beneficiaries. **We urge you to pass S. 1223 to ensure that access to components and accessories used with CRT manual wheelchairs is protected.**

For more information on S. 1223, please contact Gillian Mueller (Gillian_Mueller@casey.senate.gov) in Senator Casey’s office or Seth Gold (Seth_Gold@portman.senate.gov) in Senator Portman’s office.

The ITEM Coalition is a national consumer and clinician-led coalition advocating for access to and coverage of assistive devices, technologies, and related services for persons with injuries, illnesses, disabilities, and chronic conditions of all ages. Our members represent individuals with a wide range of disabling conditions, as well as the providers who serve them, including such conditions as multiple sclerosis, spinal cord injuries, brain injuries, stroke, paralysis, limb loss, cerebral palsy, hearing and speech impairments, visual impairments, vision loss, spina bifida, myositis, and other life-altering conditions.

¹ “New Medicare CRT Supplier Survey Identifies Major Decrease in Access to Critical Components (Accessories) Used with CRT Manual Wheelchairs,” The National Coalition for Assistive and Rehab Technology (NCART), September 2018. Available online at <http://blog.access2crt.org/congress-needs-to-see-new-data-showing-crt-access-issues/>

We greatly appreciate your attention to this important issue. Should you have any further questions regarding the information contained in our letter, please contact the ITEM Coalition Coordinator, Peter Thomas, at Peter.Thomas@PowersLaw.com or call 202-872-6730.

Sincerely,

ITEM Coalition Steering Committee Members

Amputee Coalition
Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation
National Multiple Sclerosis Society
Paralyzed Veterans of America
United Spinal Association

ITEM Coalition Signatories

ACCSES
American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation
American Association on Health and Disability
American Cochlear Implant Alliance
American Congress of Rehabilitation Medicine
American Medical Rehabilitation Providers Association
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Physical Therapy Association
American Therapeutic Recreation Association
Association of Assistive Technology Act Programs
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National Council on Independent Living
National Registry of Rehabilitation Technology Suppliers
Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology Society of North America
Spina Bifida Association of America
The ALS Association
The Arc of the United States
The Simon Foundation for Continence

cc:

The Honorable Bob Casey (PA)
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20002

The Honorable Rob Portman (OH)
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