

113TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. 2046

To amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to provide Medicare beneficiaries coordinated care and greater choice with regard to accessing hearing health services and benefits.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

FEBRUARY 26, 2014

Mr. BROWN introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Finance

A BILL

To amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to provide Medicare beneficiaries coordinated care and greater choice with regard to accessing hearing health services and benefits.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Access to Hearing
5 Healthcare Act of 2014”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress finds the following:

1 (1) Approximately 36,000,000 Americans expe-
2 rience some degree of hearing loss and by 2030 that
3 number is expected to increase to 78,000,000 Ameri-
4 cans.

5 (2) Hearing impairment is one of the most
6 common conditions affecting older adults, with ap-
7 proximately 33 percent of Americans aged 60 years
8 and over and 40 to 50 percent of those aged 75
9 years and older experiencing hearing loss.

10 (3) The National Institute on Deafness and
11 Other Communication Disorders estimates that ap-
12 proximately 15 percent (26 million) of Americans
13 between the ages of 20 and 69 have high frequency
14 hearing loss due to exposure to loud sounds or noise
15 at work or in leisure activities.

16 (4) Hearing loss is a major barrier to partici-
17 pating in society, both economically and socially.

18 (5) Hearing loss among senior citizens, if left
19 untreated, can result in isolation and depression.

20 (6) The Department of Veterans Affairs allows
21 veterans to directly access audiologists and has re-
22 ported that this policy, adopted in 1992, provides
23 high-quality, efficient, and cost-effective hearing
24 care.

1 (7) The Office of Personnel Management allows
2 Federal employees and Members of Congress to di-
3 rectly access audiologists through the Federal Em-
4 ployees Health Benefits Program.

5 (8) Audiologists are licensed in each State and
6 the District of Columbia and the scope of services
7 furnished by audiologists is determined by each ju-
8 risdiction involved.

9 (9) Consistency in Federal policy with respect
10 to hearing health services should be encouraged to
11 the greatest extent possible.

12 (10) Audiologists hold Master's or Doctoral De-
13 grees in audiology, completing university training
14 programs which provide for rigorous theoretical and
15 clinical education on evaluation, diagnosis, and
16 treatment.

17 (11) As of January 1, 2010, audiologists are
18 categorized under a unique broad occupation cat-
19 egory within the Standard Occupational Classifica-
20 tion (SOC) system to better reflect the diagnostic
21 and treatment nature of the services they provide.

1 **SEC. 3. ENABLING MEDICARE BENEFICIARIES TO HAVE**
 2 **THEIR CHOICE OF QUALIFIED HEARING**
 3 **HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS.**

4 Section 1861(l)(3) of the Social Security Act (42
 5 U.S.C. 1395x(l)(3)) is amended by inserting before the
 6 period at the end the following: “, without regard to any
 7 requirement that the individual receiving the audiology
 8 services be under the care of (or referred by) a physician
 9 or other health care practitioner or that such services are
 10 provided under the supervision of a physician or other
 11 health care practitioner”.

12 **SEC. 4. INCLUSION OF AUDIOLOGY SERVICES AS MEDICAL**
 13 **SERVICES UNDER MEDICARE PART B; PAY-**
 14 **MENT FOR SUCH SERVICES.**

15 (a) IN GENERAL.—Section 1861(s)(2) of the Social
 16 Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1395x(s)(2)) is amended—

17 (1) in subparagraph (EE), by striking “and” at
 18 the end;

19 (2) in subparagraph (FF), by inserting “and”
 20 at the end; and

21 (3) by adding at the end the following new sub-
 22 paragraph:

23 “(GG) audiology services (as defined in
 24 subsection (l)(3));”.

25 (b) PAYMENT UNDER THE PHYSICIAN FEE SCHED-
 26 ULE.—Section 1848(j)(3) of the Social Security Act (42

1 U.S.C. 1395w-4(j)(3)) is amended by inserting
2 “(2)(GG),” before “(3)”.

3 **SEC. 5. CONSTRUCTION; EFFECTIVE DATE.**

4 (a) CONSTRUCTION.—Nothing in the amendments
5 made by this Act shall be construed to expand the scope
6 of audiology services for which payment may be made
7 under title XVIII of the Social Security Act on December
8 31, 2013.

9 (b) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendments made by
10 this Act shall take effect with respect to services furnished
11 on or after January 1, 2015.

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