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 **Audiologists Urge Congress and Federal Regulators to Allow Services for**

**Medicare Beneficiaries via Telehealth**

Access to audiologists critical for isolated seniors

**RESTON, Va., March 30, 2020—**As coronavirus forces many seniors into isolation, The American Academy of Audiology is engaged with Congress requesting inclusion of reimbursement coverage of Audiologists in COVID-19 relief legislation. The “Creating Opportunities Now for Necessary and Effective Care Technologies (CONNECT) for Health Act of 2019 (S.274/H.R.4932) has bipartisan support and is designed to eliminate many of the barriers that exist with regard to telehealth in the Medicare program. The Academy has also reached out to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid and urged them to exercise their regulatory authority to allow seniors to access audiology services via telehealth.

The current COVID-19 crisis has caused a myriad of economic and healthcare issues across the U.S. While huge strides have been made to expand patient access to healthcare providers via telehealth to enable patients to continue to receive needed services while minimizing face-to-face contact, Medicare has not allowed audiologists to be reimbursed for these services.

“Research demonstrates that untreated hearing loss in seniors is related to poor health outcomes including increasing the odds of falling,” said Catherine Palmer, Ph.D., president of the American Academy of Audiology and associate professor, University of Pittsburgh and director of Audiology for the UPMC Health System. “Individuals with even mild hearing loss are three times more likely to experience a fall and falls are the leading cause of fatalities in Americans over 65,” Palmer added. Research has found that seniors with untreated hearing loss are more likely to develop cognitive decline up to 40% faster than those without hearing loss.

“The isolation that many seniors are facing right now as senior living facilities across the country have enforced a lockdown, can lead to increased feelings of isolation and depression,” Palmer explained. “Untreated hearing loss is linked to social isolation and depression as well. This is a frightening time for many seniors and communicating adequately is essential for them to interact with caregivers and to stay connected with family members.

While the Department of Veteran Affairs has recognized the importance of providing audiology services via telehealth as an effective way to reach veterans, audiologists are hopeful that Congress will eliminate the barriers that currently exist with the Medicare program. The pending legislation would authorize the Secretary of Health and Human Services to waive restrictions on the types of providers who are not currently permitted to provide and be reimbursed for telehealth services. In addition, the proposed legislation would authorize payment for expanded telehealth services during national emergencies (such as the one we’re experiencing) under the Social Security Act.

“We want to make sure that those who need our services have access to audiologists,” Palmer added.

For more information, visit [www.audiology.org](http://www.audiology.org).

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The American Academy of Audiology is the world's largest professional organization of, by and for audiologists. Representing the interests of approximately 14,000 audiologists nationwide, the Academy is dedicated to providing quality hearing care services through professional development, education, research, and increased public awareness of hearing and balance disorders. For more information or to find an audiologist, go to [www.howsyourhearing.org](http://www.howsyourhearing.org).