



Cosponsor the Access to Genetic Counselor Services Act H.R. 2144 / S. 1450

Medicare beneficiaries face significant barriers in accessing genetic counselor services, and these barriers worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic. Recent evidence also finds disparities to accessing genetic counseling services based on social determinants of health and geographic location.

Background

- ***Genetic counselors are experts with advanced training in medical genetics and counseling.***
- ***Genetic counselors support patients and providers,*** supporting informed consent, patient decision-making, providing information on benefits, risks, and limitations of genetic testing, and communicating results.
- ***Genetic counselors improve patient care.*** The services of the more than 5,800 certified genetic counselors in the U.S. are increasingly important to patients and providers given advances in genetic testing, with approximately ten new genetic tests becoming available daily, and as genetic testing is becoming more complex, according to research published in Health Affairs.
- ***Genetic counselors improve healthcare costs.*** There is evidence that genetic counselors, when involved in the testing process, save healthcare dollars, reduce inappropriate testing, and can improve compliance with recommended medical management plans.
- ***Genetic counseling and testing improve the care of Medicare beneficiaries*** considering genetic testing for certain conditions that affect older Americans – such as cancer, cardiovascular disease, and neurological conditions. The NIH Genetic and Rare Diseases Information Center highlights the value of genetic counseling for multiple rare conditions that have a genetic component.

Problem

- Current Medicare policy denies Medicare beneficiaries direct access to highly trained, board-certified genetic counselors to navigate complex factors affecting their health.
- Limited access to genetic counseling services can result in increased wait-times for genetic testing and subsequent delays in diagnosis.
- Analysis by researchers with the Center for Observational and Real-World Evidence at Merck & Co., Inc. found a “disparity in access” to genetic counselor care based on socioeconomic factors, including family income, and significant differences in access genetic counselors by geographic region across the U.S. These disparities could hinder Medicare beneficiary access to genetic counseling services that are increasingly important in personalized medicine, such as therapies for high-risk cancer.

Solution

- Enact H.R. 2144 / S. 1450 to update Medicare law to improve the lives of up to 60 million Americans, including those with rare diseases.
- H.R. 2144 / S. 1450 will:
 - Provide beneficiaries direct access to genetic counselors through direct access and billing,
 - Improve care for all patients seeking genetic counseling by facilitating the ability of additional physician practices and hospitals to employ genetic counselors,
 - Enable genetic counselors to bill Medicare directly and be reimbursed for services delivered to Medicare beneficiaries at 85% of physician payment levels,
 - Enhance team-based care coordination for all patients, facilitate education and communication for patients and providers, and increase patient and provider satisfaction, and
 - Help to address health disparities and inequities that affect those with lower incomes, improving care for vulnerable, dual eligible Medicare-Medicaid beneficiaries.
- Improving Medicare beneficiary access to genetic counselors could also improve care for non-Medicare patients, including family members who could benefit from genetic testing.

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