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Leading Physician Coalition Applauds House Ways and Means Committee for Advancing Legislation to Streamline Prior Authorization in the Medicare Advantage Program

The Regulatory Relief Coalition (RRC) — a group of national physician specialty organizations advocating for reduced regulatory burdens that interfere with patient care — strongly applauds the House Committee on Ways and Means and thanks its leadership, Chair Richard Neal (D-MA) and Ranking Member Kevin Brady (R-TX), for advancing the Improving Seniors’ Timely Access to Care Act.

A key stakeholder in initiating and negotiating the legislation, RRC is pleased that the committee shares our commitment to protecting patients from unnecessary delays in care by streamlining and standardizing prior authorization in the MA program. This committee’s markup is a critical step towards fulfilling RRC’s goal of ensuring that physicians spend more time treating patients and providing care, and less time on bureaucratic hurdles.

Coalition founders, the American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO) and the American Association of Neurological Surgeons/Congress of Neurological Surgeons (AANS/CNS), are joined by all RRC members in urging Congress to follow the committee’s action by passing this bipartisan legislation before the end of this year. With more than 300 House co-sponsors, and over [500 endorsing organizations](#) representing patients, providers, and the medical technology and biopharmaceutical industry, it is time for this bill to become the law of the land.

“This commonsense, bipartisan bill will help protect patients from an obviously broken system that blocks them from accessing the health care that physicians prescribe for them,” said George A. Williams, MD, Senior Secretary for Advocacy of the American Academy of Ophthalmology. “The Improving Seniors’ Timely Access to Care Act will, for the first time ever, establish an electronic prior authorization system. It will also allow for real-time decisions, full transparency, and real patient protections for America’s seniors. Our patients can’t wait any longer for relief.” - **American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO)**

“Neurosurgical patients suffer from painful and life-threatening neurologic conditions such as brain tumors, debilitating, degenerative spine disorders, stroke and Parkinson’s Disease. They often face permanent neurologic damage and death without timely medical care. Congress needs to hold Medicare Advantage plans accountable and pass the Improving Seniors’ Timely Access to Care Act to streamline prior authorization so our patients can get the care they need when they need it,” said John K. Ratliff, MD, FAANS, a practicing neurosurgeon at Stanford University, and chair of the AANS/CNS Washington Committee. - **American Association of Neurological Surgeons/Congress of Neurological Surgeons (AANS/CNS)**

The Improving Seniors Timely Access to Care Act would improve prior authorization by:

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- Establishing an electronic prior authorization (ePA) program;
- Standardizing and streamlining the prior authorization process for routinely approved services, including establishing a list of services eligible for real-time prior authorization decisions;
- Ensuring prior authorization requests are reviewed by qualified medical personnel; and Increasing transparency around MA prior authorization requirements and their use.

The RRC especially appreciates the stalwart work of Ways and Means Committee members, Reps. Suzan DelBene (D-WA) and Mike Kelly (R-PA), along with the bill's two other co-leads, Reps. Ami Bera, MD (D-CA) and Larry Bucshon, MD (R-IN) for their efforts. The coalition is also grateful that the Senate bill leads — Sens. Roger Marshall (R-KS), Kyrsten Sinema (D-AZ), John Thune (R-SD) and Sherrod Brown (D-OH) — are working tirelessly to advance this legislation this year as well.

What Our Coalition Members and Allies are Saying about the Legislation

“The Improving Seniors’ Timely Access to Care Act would increase efficiency and transparency for prior authorization within the Medicare Advantage program,” said ACC President Edward T. A. Fry, MD, FACC. “This legislation will help the patients we treat, while also reducing administrative burden, removing barriers to care, lowering the cost of care, and improving care team well-being. The ACC urges Congress to pass this bipartisan and widely supported legislation.” - **American Academy of Cardiology (ACC)**

“The impacts of prior authorization are jarring: over 90 percent of physicians report care delays from prior authorization, and more than 80 percent say it can lead to patients abandoning treatment. Ultimately, this burdensome practice impacts family physicians and the people we need to protect the most—our patients. Amid physician burnout, staffing shortages and the pressures of the COVID-19 pandemic, it has never been more critical for Congress to pass legislation to fix prior authorization so physicians can spend more time treating patients and practicing medicine.” - Sterling N. Ransone, Jr., MD, FAAFP, President, **American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP)**

“Together with the COVID-19 pandemic and the inefficiency of prior authorization, patients have been subjected to further delays in their neurologic care. Prior authorization needs to be brought into the 21st century. For this reason, the AAN is pleased to support the Improving Seniors’ Timely Access to Care Act of 2021 to create an electronic prior authorization program, increase transparency to assist in choosing the right plans, and ensure requests are approved by qualified medical personnel. This legislation is undoubtedly a step in the right direction for neurologists and their patients.” said Orly Avitzur, MD, MBA, President of the **American Academy of Neurology (AAN)**.

“AAPM&R applauds the Ways and Means Committee for taking steps to reform the use of prior authorization that is increasing barriers to care for patients, including those in need of rehabilitation. As more enrollees, especially seniors and individuals with disabilities, choose Medicare Advantage for their health insurance needs, it is crucial that prior authorization is not a barrier to access. Data from the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission (MedPAC) demonstrate that Medicare Advantage beneficiaries receive one-third the access to inpatient rehabilitation facilities (IRFs) that traditional Medicare beneficiaries receive. We are hopeful that the advancement of this legislation will streamline the process and increase transparency to prevent patients from receiving unnecessary delays and denials to the timely and medically necessary treatment they deserve.” - **Deborah Venesy, MD, American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (AAPM&R)**

“AAOS has been working very hard to make prior authorization processes less rigorous and time-consuming for the musculoskeletal community. Prior authorization denials are mostly egregious and arbitrary, making no sense other than to deny necessary care and jeopardize patients who need access to timely orthopaedic care. AAOS fully supports the Improving Seniors’ Timely Access to Care Act to reform the broken and burdensome prior authorization process.” - Felix H. Savoie, III, MD, FAAOS, President, **American Association of Orthopaedic Surgeons (AAOS)**

“A recent Office of Inspector General (OIG) report highlighted what oncology providers have been saying for years—prior authorizations are delaying cancer care in Medicare Advantage (MA). Cancer doesn’t wait to impact peoples’ lives, so why are people with cancer waiting longer than they have to for their care? Now is the time for Congress to pass the bipartisan Improving Seniors’ Timely Access to Care Act, which would streamline prior authorization and improve transparency around its use in MA, thereby helping protect patients from unnecessary care delays.” Lori J. Pierce, MD, FASTRO, FASCO, Board Chair of the **Association for Clinical Oncology (ASCO)**

“American College of Surgeons (ACS) strongly supports the Improving Seniors’ Timely Access to Care Act. This legislation brings much-needed transparency and oversight to Medicare Advantage plans’ requirements on prior authorization,” said Patricia L. Turner, MD, MBA, FACS, ACS Executive Director. “Not only are surgeons facing growing administrative burdens due to excessive prior authorization requirements, but seniors are needlessly impacted by the resulting delays in care. Streamlining prior authorization is critical to ensuring timely access to medically necessary care.” - **American College of Surgeons**

“MGMA strongly supports the Improving Seniors’ Timely Access to Care Act — commonsense legislation that would streamline administrative processes and reduce onerous prior authorization requirements for medical practices, prioritizing the physician-patient relationship and removing dangerous barriers to the timely delivery of medically necessary care.” - **Medical Group Management Association (MGMA)**

“Prior authorization is not only a burden to physicians and their practice, it is also a deliberate barrier to care for patients – particularly those most at need – by delaying services that are routinely approved. The Improving Seniors Timely Access to Care Act would greatly reduce this burden and protect the physician-patient relationship.”- Philip L. Schneider, MD, President, **National Association of Spine Specialists**

“With record labor shortages, inflation and other financial pressures being top of mind for providers, the need to leverage technology to create efficiencies and solve healthcare challenges is desperately needed. By establishing an electronic prior authorization program, the Improving Seniors’ Timely Access to Care Act would support the use of advanced technologies to reduce administrative burden, permit providers to focus on patient care, and improve access for patients.” --Soumi Saha, Senior Vice President, Government Affairs, **Premier Inc.**

More information about the RRC and the legislation is available at www.regrelief.org.