Direct Access: A Deliberate Approach to Reaching Audiology's Goals

What is Direct Access? Currently Medicare patients must obtain a physician order prior to seeing an audiologist to have the services reimbursed by Medicare. Direct Access, as the legislation is commonly referred to, eliminates the need for the order.

Why Direct Access?

- Eliminating the physician order requirement in the current Medicare model would afford audiologists greater professional autonomy and is an important first step towards achieving additional goals of the profession.
- Improves access to hearing health care for Medicare beneficiaries.
- It is a pragmatic approach, cultivated over many years with input from leading independent consultants who are experts in policy and political strategy, audiologists, and American Academy of Audiology staff.
- Continuity demonstrates a mature and respected presence on Capitol Hill and a sound and calculated advocacy plan.

What Direct Access DOES NOT Do

- Direct Access does NOT change or expand scope of practice. Why not? Eliminating the current “gatekeeper” model is the most essential first step that must be taken before further steps are made towards the long term goals of the profession.
- Direct Access does NOT address every goal that the profession of audiology would like to achieve. Why not? Consultants and policy experts maintain that an incremental approach is more effective in garnering support from policymakers and employs a more traditional strategy of “earning” additional benefits as opposed to demanding them all at one time which can be polarizing and ineffective.

Myths and Facts about Direct Access

**MYTH:** Direct Access has failed. **TRUTH:** Efforts towards Direct Access have been underway for around 10 years. Each Congressional session (two years), thousands of bills are introduced and most are not passed, meaning they must be reintroduced and re-tried in the next session.

**MYTH:** If Direct Access were to pass, it would be years before we could re-approach Congress on another initiative. **TRUTH:** There is no statute of limitations in place for lobbying Capitol Hill. A more conventional strategy would be to approach Congressional leaders in the session immediately following the passage of direct access, for example, to build on the momentum and success of the initiative.

Why Hasn’t Direct Access Passed? The single most determining factor in successful legislation versus unsuccessful legislation is the constituency behind it. **YOU!** 1) **Ask Your State Academy to Endorse Direct Access and send your endorsement letter to your elected officials.** 2) **Contact your elected officials in support of direct access or, even more effective, schedule a meeting with them.** Visit the American Academy of Audiology’s Legislative Action Center for more information [www.audiology.org](http://www.audiology.org).