



July 2, 2021

Chiquita Brooks LaSure
Administrator
Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Administrator Brooks LaSure:

On behalf of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), I write to congratulate you on your confirmation as Administrator of the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). ASHA appreciates the health care expertise you bring to CMS and looks forward to working with you to advance policies of mutual interest. I would like to request a meeting with you to discuss policies that are important to ASHA members and determine how best to partner with you to advance our shared objectives.

ASHA is the national professional, scientific, and credentialing association for 218,000 members and affiliates who are audiologists; speech-language pathologists (SLPs); speech, language, and hearing scientists; audiology and speech-language pathology support personnel; and students. Audiologists and SLPs provide patient-centered care in the prevention, identification, diagnosis, and evidence-based treatment of hearing, balance, speech, language, cognitive communication, and swallowing disorders in individuals of all ages.

The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated pervasive inequities and deficiencies in our health care system, particularly for older Americans. Medicare beneficiaries, especially those from historically underserved backgrounds and those in provider shortage areas, have borne the brunt of COVID-19 restrictions and reduced payments for the essential services that they rely on. ASHA greatly appreciates that CMS used authority provided by Congress to help address these limitations during this unprecedented time by enabling audiologists and SLPs to provide services through telehealth during the COVID-19 public health emergency (PHE).

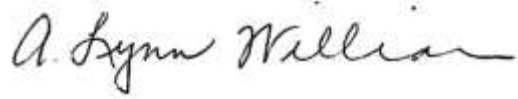
Unfortunately, two impeding events threaten to further restrict Medicare beneficiaries' access to audiology and speech-language pathology services, which will impact patients' health and impose avoidable costs on the health care system. Both the expiration of the COVID-19 PHE and future reductions to reimbursement—related to office/outpatient Evaluation and Management payment changes in the 2021 Medicare Physician Fee Schedule final rule—will have a profound impact on Medicare patients.

ASHA's members play a critical role in increasing access to care cost effectively for vulnerable individuals, especially those for whom the current system has failed, and can be a helpful resource in addressing these challenges. I would welcome an opportunity to share our perspective on how adequate reimbursement for the services ASHA members provide, and the ability to deliver those services through telehealth when clinically appropriate, will reduce health disparities and ensure America's seniors get the care they need.

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I welcome the opportunity to meet with you to share additional information about how audiologists and SLPs can help increase access to health care, lower health care costs, and promote health equity, as well as to learn how we can effectively partner with you going forward. To schedule a meeting, please contact Jeffrey P. Regan, ASHA's Director of Government Affairs and Public Policy, at jregan@asha.org.

Kind Regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "A. Lynn Williams".

A Lynn Williams, PHD, CCC-SLP
2021