



CMS Must “Make Permanent” the Current Medicare Policy for Complex Rehabilitative Manual Wheelchair Accessories – Action Needed Before June 30, 2021

We respectfully request that the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) take action before June 30 to provide equal access for Medicare beneficiaries who require Complex Rehabilitative wheelchairs and accessories. As explained below, work to resolve this access issue has been taking place over several years, but CMS action is required as soon as possible to “make permanent” a policy that expires June 30, 2021.

Complex Rehabilitative (CR) wheelchairs and accessories are used by people with significant disabilities including spinal cord injury, ALS, Multiple Sclerosis, and other serious conditions. These individually configured mobility and seating systems allow this small group of beneficiaries—representing just 7% of all Medicare manual wheelchair users—to manage their medical needs and fully participate in their lives. Without CR wheelchairs, many would be bed confined. Of note, these CR wheelchairs have taken on even more importance in helping people with disabilities manage the challenges and risks of the COVID- 19 pandemic.

In 2017, CMS acted—at the urging of Congress—and issued a policy clarification recognizing that Medicare Competitive Bidding Program (CBP) pricing information was not to be applied to CR POWER wheelchair accessories. However, this did not address CR MANUAL wheelchair accessories. To close this gap, in December 2019 Congress passed language in H.R. 1865 to make clear that its intent was for both CR power and CR manual wheelchair accessories to be treated the same in terms of Medicare payment and that CBP pricing information was not to be applied to either.

Included in H.R. 1865 was an eighteen-month policy suspension that prevented CMS from using Medicare Competitive Bidding Program (CBP) pricing information for Standard wheelchair accessories to set payment rates for CR manual wheelchair accessories. The suspension expires on June 30, 2021. These complex products are not off-the-shelf commodity items and CBP pricing for Standard wheelchair accessories should not be applied to much different CR wheelchair accessories.

CR wheelchair accessories are highly tailored, individualized products that perform critical functions for the Medicare beneficiaries who require them. Unlike what the name implies, “accessories” are not nice-to-have items, but instead, provide important benefits like preventing skin pressure sores, positioning/supporting the person upright so they can breathe, and allowing the operation of the wheelchair to be specifically designed to their physical limitations and needs.

Congress has legislated that CBP pricing information should not be applied to either Complex Rehabilitative power or manual wheelchair accessories. Accordingly, we request that the temporary policy passed in 2019 be made permanent prior to the June 30, 2021 expiration. We ask that CMS take this action for Complex Rehabilitative manual wheelchair accessories, as it did in 2017 for Complex Rehabilitative power wheelchair accessories, before June 30 to provide equal access to both groups of people with disabilities who depend on this technology to maintain their independence and minimize their healthcare costs.