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# ­The Medicare and Medicaid Dental, Vision, and Hearing Benefits Act

Background

In 2008, The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) adopted regulations prohibiting Medicare and Medicaid coverage of eyeglasses and any device that uses lenses. The regulation, known as the Eyeglass Exclusion, also prohibited coverage of devices designed to aid individuals with low vision, including handheld magnifiers, video magnifiers, and other devices necessary to enable such individuals to access and interpret visual and written information. These devices are vital to enhance independence and improve quality of life for individuals with low vision. Devices designed to magnify and improve the readability of text enable low-vision individuals to access information found on prescription medicine bottles, street and building signage, and other safety and security information. Access to low-vision devices is thus a crucial component of maintaining one’s mental and physical health.

Low-vision devices can often be out of reach for many individuals with Medicare or Medicaid benefits due to cost. Such devices are vital to maintaining health and avoiding complications resulting from mismanaged health and sedentary lifestyles. (These devices often mean the difference between remaining in one’s own home or community and being placed or remaining in an institutionalized setting.)

If people with low vision are unable to access valuable information relating to medication or feel unsafe going out and participating in their communities due to not having the right tools, then their mental and physical health will suffer. It is time for CMS to rescind the detrimental low-vision device exclusion and start providing coverage for low-vision devices like magnifiers and other devices that enhance color contrast and lighting conditions. Such devices are necessary to improve quality of life for low-vision individuals and allow them to remain in their community.

Call to Action

On March 16, 2023, Sen. Bob Casey (D-PA) introduced the Medicare and Medicaid Dental, Vision, and Hearing Benefits Act (S. 842) to enable CMS, under the Medicare program, to cover routine vision care, including low-vision devices prescribed by a doctor and which would permit a state to cover these devices under its Medicaid program. Rep. Lloyd Doggett (D-TX) introduced a similar bill that does not include Medicaid coverage for low vision devices (H.R. 33) on January 9, 2023.

ACB calls on Congress to pass the Medicare and Medicaid Dental, Vision, and Hearing Benefits Act. When meeting with your member of Congress, be sure to tell them what having access to visual and textual information with the proper tools and devices, especially if you have low vision or live with individuals who do, would mean for you, and explain what barriers exist that impede your ability to manage your health safely and independently.