



Learn more about the Academy's advocacy efforts through the following resources:

- ★ Academy's Government Relations and Reimbursement News web pages
- ★ Legislative Action Center
- ★ *Audiology Weekly* E-Newsletter
- ★ Grassroots Advocacy Network (sign up today!)
- ★ *Audiology Today* articles
- ★ Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter
- ★ Text messages on the latest audiology breaking news. Opt-in by texting "Advocacy" to 797979. Msg&data rates may apply. To unsubscribe from this list reply 'STOP' to 797979.



Kent State University student, Katrina Potter, meets with a staffer in Representative Mike Kelly's (PA-16) office.

This *Year in Review* provides an overview of the ways in which the Academy used its legislative, regulatory, and political resources to advocate for audiologists amidst the backdrop of the COVID-19 global pandemic.

The year began with a webinar for Academy members on expected 2020 advocacy topics as well as three student Capitol Hill visits before most in-person activity shut down in mid-March. Although the pandemic curtailed most if not all in-person interaction, activity on the advocacy front continued full force as the Academy sought out opportunities to help audiologists mitigate the impact of the pandemic on their practices as well as advance the existing legislative and regulatory priorities.

The year ahead promises to be a busy one particularly considering the results of the 2020 elections. We will see the re-introduction of the Medicare Audiology Access and Services Act and continue to build upon the strides made during the last Congress.

We are likely to see renewed discussions regarding a potential hearing care benefit in Medicare, the release of proposed regulations to implement the Over-the-Counter Hearing Aid Act, as well as on-going efforts to mitigate 2021 Medicare reimbursement cuts to audiologists and other providers.

Efforts will continue to secure the passage of legislation in additional states to implement the Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology Interstate Licensure Compact (ASLP-IC). Once 10 states pass the requisite implementing legislation, the compact will become operational and facilitate practitioner mobility and telehealth capabilities.

The Academy will continue to advocate on all available fronts and actively seek out new opportunities to advance the interests and continued success of the profession.

Legislative Activities

Medicare Audiology Access and Services Act/ Joint Audiology Bill (H.R. 4056/S. 2446)

- ★ Worked collaboratively with Academy of Doctors of Audiology (ADA) and the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) to secure a total of 63 co-sponsors in the House and six in the Senate by the conclusion of the 116th Congress.
- ★ Worked collaboratively with ADA and ASHA to secure a private study or “score” to estimate the likely cost of the legislation to the government. The Academy was pleased to be able to share with federal lawmakers that the overall cost was extremely modest and would provide beneficiaries actual savings by eliminating unnecessary co-pays.
- ★ Co-hosted a virtual congressional briefing titled Optimizing the Delivery of Audiology Services Under Medicare that highlighted the need for the Medicare Audiologist Access and Services Act of 2019 (H.R.4056).

VA Hearing Instrument Specialist Legislation (S.785)

Legislation was introduced requiring the VA system to hire at least one hearing instrument specialist (HIS) in each facility and to use definitions from the Department of Labor apprenticeship program and ONET classifications to define the responsibilities of the HIS. Passage of this legislation could not only put unnecessary burden and restrictions on the VA system but also could set precedence for other government programs.

- ★ Secured amendment language that removed requirement that the VA incorporate DOL apprenticeship program and the O*NET data into qualifications for VA hearing instrument specialists. Instead, qualifications shall be based on state licensure requirements and competencies needed to perform tasks within the specific setting of the VA.

Also successfully added new language to clarify that the VA shall retain the authority to set and maintain the acceptable job duties and responsibilities for hearing instrument specialists hired under these qualifications for the purposes of their employment with the VA. The amended legislation will reinforce the primary role of the audiologist in hearing health care.

Ally's Act/H.R. 5485

This legislation would mandate private insurance coverage of auditory implant devices (cochlear implants and bone-anchored hearing aids) and external sound processors as deemed necessary for a physician or audiologist.

- ★ Successfully provided amendment language to add coverage for multiple audiology appointments, coverage for “aural rehabilitation and treatment services,” and a specific reference to the Medicare “qualified audiologist” definition.

Holding Providers Harmless from Medicare Cuts During Covid-19 Act of 2020/H.R. 8702

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) issued the final 2021 Medicare Physician Fee Schedule (MPFS) on December 2, 2020. Unfortunately, CMS failed to provide relief from a significant shift in physician and non-physician payments slated to take effect on January 1, 2021. This change is estimated to impact audiology services by -6 percent.

These changes are due to regulatory policies beyond the control of the Academy, specifically budget neutrality requirements triggered by higher payment for evaluation and management (E/M) services.

- ★ Joined with other affected providers groups in national press release calling upon Congress to intervene.
- ★ Called upon members to weigh in with their elected officials via the Academy Legislative Action Center.

COVID-19 Relief Package Advocacy Efforts

- ★ Throughout the COVID pandemic, Congress passed several COVID-related relief packages. The Academy weighed in numerous times via letter, phone calls, and Zoom meetings with House and Senate leadership to elevate the concerns of audiologists with regard to the increased need for the Joint Audiology Legislation, the ability to provide services via telehealth as well as the need for Congress to mitigate the expected 2021 Medicare reimbursement cuts to audiologists and other providers.

Regulatory Activities

- ★ Successfully advocated for the ability of audiologists to provide services via telehealth. Although the recognition is time limited to the pandemic and covers only two codes related to cochlear implants, the Academy will use this opportunity to advocate for the permanent inclusion of additional audiology codes.
- ★ Successfully worked with other affected provider types via a dedicated coalition to address planned 2021 Medicare reimbursement cuts. Increased reimbursement for evaluation and management services in 2021 would have resulted in corresponding reimbursement reductions for a wide variety of providers and would have impacted audiology by -6 percent. Congress included in the final stimulus package of the year an additional \$3 billion to the Physician Fee Schedule. Services paid under the fee schedule between January 1, 2021, and January 1, 2022, will increase by 3.75 percent.
- ★ Submitted letter to CMS highlighting some of the unique circumstances and distinctions relative to audiology that will compound the effect of the planned reimbursement reductions.
- ★ Continuous monitoring of the FDA in anticipation of the proposed regulations to implement the Over-the-Counter Hearing Aid Act of 2017.
- ★ Submitted a letter to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid services (CMS) urging them to issue a Correction Notice to the 2021 Physician Fee Schedule to add audiologists to the list of providers able to use online assessment “G” codes designed for practitioners who are not authorized to perform evaluation and management (“E&M”) services.

Student Academy of Audiology—Alabama members, Kirston Clifton and Megan Tice, make their first trip to Capitol Hill!



Newly elected President Biden and Vice President Harris are expected to focus on a number of health-care-related issues including increasing patient access to care and transparency.

DID YOU KNOW?



Coding and Reimbursement

- ★ Analyzed, submitted comments, and prepared summary educational documents detailing the proposed and final rules for the CY 2021 Medicare Physician Fee Schedule, Hospital Outpatient Prospective Payment System and the Quality Payment Program (QPP).
- ★ Chaired the Audiology Quality Consortium (AQC), a dynamic group of ten audiology organizations. AQC’s mission is to collaborate on the development of audiology quality measures; monitor the status of audiology quality measures for reporting under the QPP; Respond to proposed rules and measure changes by CMS and other measure owners on behalf of the audiology community; Educate audiologists regarding audiology quality measures and QPP reporting requirements.
- ★ Contributed articles for each issue of Audiology Today, focused on timely topics of member interest and concern (included telehealth, new CPT codes, and specialty areas of audiology practice).
- ★ Established a cross-committee collaborative effort with the State Relations Committee to increase state-specific Medicaid billing/coding information for practitioners available on Academy website (final version expected early 2021).



The Medicare Audiologist Access and Services Act will be reintroduced in 2021 and will remain the top legislative priority for the Academy.

DID YOU KNOW?

Political Action Committee (PAC) Activities

- ★ Contributed to both political parties based on congressional members’ positions on committees of jurisdiction and stance on hearing health issues.
- ★ Created new PAC “Frequently Asked Questions” document for members.
- ★ Participated in numerous “virtual” fundraiser events.
- ★ Started planning 2021 virtual PAC wine tasting fundraising event.

Kyndell Belcher from the University of Akron strikes a pose outside Congresswoman Lisa Blunt Rochester’s office.

State Activities

- ★ Provided on-going support for the Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology Interstate Licensure Compact (ASLP-IC).
- ★ Began quarterly State Advocacy Leader calls designed to allow state academy leaders to share legislative and advocacy news with their counterparts in other states.
- ★ Submitted letter of support for KY H.B. 217—legislation that would remove the requirement of second licensure for audiologists to sell or fit hearing instruments
- ★ Submitted letter of support for PA H.B. 1220, The Congenital Cytomegalovirus (CMV) Education and Newborn Screening Act.
- ★ Weighed in on VA SB 423—legislation to require insurance coverage for children’s hearing aids but would require the prescription of an otolaryngologist.
- ★ Created a new resource that provides a comprehensive summary of state regulation of audiology support personnel.



Supporting passage of implementing legislation in state legislatures for the Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology Interstate Compact (ASLP-IC) is a top legislative priority for the Academy at the state level.

DID YOU KNOW?



Ohio State and University of Cincinnati students discuss legislative issues at the Capitol Hill Club before meeting with legislators.

Member Engagement

Student Capitol Hill Visits/Briefings

The Academy hosted three student Capitol Hill days prior to the pandemic shut-down.

- ★ February 21, 2020—The Northeast Ohio Audiology Consortium
- ★ February 27, 2020—The Ohio State University/University of Cincinnati
- ★ March 7, 2020—Auburn University

Academy Collaborations

The Academy seeks opportunities to work with many different stakeholders to advance its advocacy efforts.

- ★ Audiology Quality Consortium (AQC)—Dedicated to address quality reporting and the transition to the Physician Quality Reporting System [PQRS] to the Quality Payment Program [QPP]
- ★ Deaf and Hard of Hearing Alliance (DHHA)
- ★ E/M Multi-Provider Coalition [group of organizations united to pursue coordinated solutions in response to expected 2021 Medicare reimbursement cuts]
- ★ Friends of the Congressional Hearing Health Caucus
- ★ National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD) Advisory Council
- ★ The Occupational Hearing Health Coalition
- ★ Patient’s Access to Responsible Care Alliance [PARCA]
- ★ Parent Choice Coalition [group of organizations interested in pushing back on problematic state LEAD-K legislation]
- ★ Professional organizations representing audiology/hearing health interests (AAO-HNS, ADA, ASHA, HIA, IHS and many more)
- ★ Professional organizations representing audiology and/or hearing health interests (AAO-HNS, ADA, ASHA, HIA, HIS, and many more)
- ★ Patients’ Access to Responsible Care Alliance (PARCA)
- ★ Friends of the Congressional Hearing Health Caucus (FCHHC)
- ★ The Occupational Hearing Health Coalition



Volunteer Involvement

Look for opportunities in 2021 to get involved with the advocacy volunteer positions.

Advocacy Council

Emily Narin, AuD, *Chair*

Government Relations Committee

Jodi Baxter, AuD, *Chair*
Lee Cottrell, AuD, *Co-Chair*

Coding and Reimbursement Committee

Anna M. Jilla, AuD, PhD
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Aaron Roman, AuD, *Chair*

Academy Advocacy Staff

Susan Pilch, JD
Kathleen Bishop

Academy Consultants

Denise Garris
Carrie Kovar