



American Association of
NURSE PRACTITIONERS™

Improve Medicare Patient Access to Home Health Services

ACTION NEEDED: Co-sponsor the Home Health Care Planning Improvement Act of 2013 (H.R. 2504/S. 1332).

This legislation would authorize nurse practitioners to certify patient eligibility for Medicare home health services.

Background: Today's nurse practitioners (NPs) play an increasingly important role in managing and delivering health care to Americans. NPs are recognized under state laws and regulations to complete and sign physical examination forms and other medical certification documents. Since 1998 NPs have been authorized Part B Medicare providers, recognized to furnish, order and refer for services under their provider numbers. NPs order physical therapy, occupational therapy, bill as consultants and consultees when providing services through telemedicine, order and bill for performing and interpreting diagnostic tests within their scope of practice, and certify patients eligible for skilled nursing care. They may also bill for services as attending providers and for services "incident to" their own service.

Nurse practitioners have demonstrated the ability to deliver safe, cost-effective, and responsible care to the patients they serve. They have expert knowledge that allows them to provide high-level assessments of patient needs and recognize when additional care such as home health care is needed. Given their proven track record and the authorization of the Balanced Budget Act of 1997 for the care of seniors and the disabled, it is illogical and impractical that nurse practitioners are recognized as Part B Medicare providers but are still unable to document face-to-face patient assessments and certify home health care plans of care for their patients.

Currently, nurse practitioners with patients who need home health care services must locate a physician who will document the nurse practitioner's assessment for this care. Further, even though NPs are authorized to perform a face-to-face assessment of the patient's needs, the Affordable Care Act now requires that a physician documents that the encounter has taken place – even if the physician is not involved in the assessment. These delays in treatment jeopardize the health of the patient and cause the Medicare program to incur additional costs by requiring the participation of additional providers with reimbursement rates higher than those of nurse practitioners.

The Home Health Care Planning Improvement Act in the 112th Congress received the support of 123 Representatives and 18 Senators. Enactment of this bill will make it possible for nurse practitioners to provide necessary services for their Medicare patients by allowing them to certify patients under their care to be eligible for home health care services. Passage of this legislation will reduce Medicare spending by eliminating duplicative services while also improving the quality and timeliness of care for beneficiaries who need home health services.

Request: AANP calls on Members of Congress to support improving beneficiary access to home health care services by co-sponsoring in the House H.R. 2504 and in the Senate S. 1332 the Home Health Care Planning Improvement Act of 2013.

For additional information, please contact the AANP Federal Health Policy Office at 703-740-2529 or federalpolicy@aanp.org.