



Access to Diabetic Shoes

Action Requested: Cosponsor S. 237 / H.R. 808, the Promoting Access to Diabetic Shoes Act. This legislation would authorize PAs to certify a Medicare patient’s need for therapeutic shoes.

PAs diagnose and treat illnesses, manage complex medical conditions, prescribe medications in all 50 states, and assist in surgery – but the current statute governing Medicare does not allow PAs to order therapeutic shoes. With the aging U.S. population and increasing prevalence of diabetes, it is absurd a PA can manage a patient’s diabetes and other complex chronic conditions, but is not permitted to order diabetic shoes. The Promoting Access to Diabetic Shoes Act will modernize current Medicare policy and authorize PAs to certify a patient’s need for therapeutic shoes.

Background: Currently, PAs and nurse practitioners (NPs) must send their diabetic Medicare patients who need therapeutic shoes to a physician to certify need. Under current law, the certifying physician must then become the provider treating the patient’s diabetic condition going forward. This can be disruptive to care for a patient that may have been under the care of a PA for years, particularly for those patients living in underserved areas where provider options may be limited. Delays in treatment caused by this burdensome statute jeopardize the health of patients and cause the Medicare program to incur additional costs by requiring the participation of an additional provider.

A study published in the American Journal of Medicine in 2018 found that PAs perform as well as physicians in the management of diabetes at diagnosis and during four years of follow-up care. PAs are federally-recognized primary care providers, and frequently manage care for patients with diabetes that may have multiple comorbidities. Outside of the Medicare program, PAs are able to certify the need for therapeutic shoes for their patients. This is an example of the Medicare statute not keeping up with how medicine is practiced today.

Modernizing Medicare law to allow PAs to certify a patient’s need for therapeutic shoes will improve care available to diabetic patients. America currently has an aging population and physician shortages in rural and medically underserved areas can make it difficult for seniors to access needed health care services.

AAPA Legislative Recommendation: AAPA recommends Congress support the Promoting Access to Diabetic Shoes Act (S. 237 / H.R. 808), which has been introduced by Senators Sherrod Brown (D-OH) and Susan Collins (R-ME), and by Reps. Earl Blumenauer (D-OR) and Tom Reed (R-NY).

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