

MAX BAUCUS
MONTANA

P. 2/2

WASHINGTON, DC
(202) 224-2851MONTANA TOLL FREE NUMBER
1-800-332-6106

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2602

INTERNET:
max@baucus.senate.gov
http://www.senate.gov/~baucus

June 22, 1999

Ms. Nancy-Ann Min DeParle, Administrator
Health Care Financing Administration
Room 314-G
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Ms. DeParle-

I have been contacted by my constituents concerning Medicare coverage for Augmentative Communication Devices ("AAC devices"). These devices provide individuals with severe expressive communication disabilities (inability to speak, use sign language, or write because of cerebral palsy, stroke, ALS, or muscular dystrophy, etc) with the invaluable ability to communicate. In turn, they lead more productive, safer and more enjoyable lives.

Despite this, over a decade ago HCFA issued a National Coverage Determination that AAC devices would not be covered by Medicare since they were classified as "communicators" and were deemed to be a convenience that was not primarily medical in nature. This decision also placed AAC devices in the Durable Medical Equipment category. This is in direct conflict with the FDA, which recognizes AAC devices as a type of prosthetic device. In addition, since HCFA's non-coverage decision, funding for AAC devices has been granted by every state Medicaid program, by CHAMPUS and the Veterans Administration at the Federal level, and by hundreds of commercial health insurance providers.

Since HCFA's determination on coverage, however, there have been significant technological improvements in AAC Devices. For example, the Dynavox AAC device was not introduced to patients until 1991. In all, HCFA's non-coverage decision hurts Medicare recipients by deterring the filing of AAC devices funding requests under Medicare, and thus denies access to individuals in need of such equipment. I would appreciate your prompt involvement in HCFA's granting much needed Medicare coverage for AAC devices.

Thank you for your attention to this request.

With best personal regards, I am

Sincerely,


BILLINGS
(406) 657-6790BOZEMAN
(406) 596-3104BUTTE
(406) 782-8700GREAT FALLS
(406) 761-1574HELENA
(406) 443-5480KALISPELL
(406) 756-1150MISSOULA
(406) 329-3123