

Noninvasive Ventilators Removed from Competitive Bidding in Big Win for ALS Community

The Medicare program at the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services removed noninvasive ventilators from competitive bidding for durable medical equipment. The decision will keep the devices out of competitive bidding for at least three years and is a victory for ALS advocates. The ALS Association and its partners have led an intense lobbying campaign against competitive bidding for noninvasive ventilators for more than a year. The Medicare program cited COVID-19 in announcing the move.

The Medicare program initiated competitive bidding program for noninvasive ventilators in March 2019. The ALS Association immediately began a campaign to make sure our community did not lose access to these medically necessary devices, as well as the clinical support provided by respiratory therapists. The Association locked arms with the American Association for Respiratory Care, the National Association for the Medical Direction of Respiratory Care, and other partners to call on the Medicare program to remove noninvasive ventilators from competitive bidding. When the Medicare program refused to reverse course, the coalition fought for introduction of the Safeguarding Medicare Access to Respiratory Therapy (SMART) Act to leverage pressure from Congress.

“Our coalition primed the pump for this decision with an intensive lobbying campaign warning lawmakers that people living with ALS would be greatly harmed if access to this life support system and respiratory therapists were restricted based on lowest-price bidding,” said Kathleen Sheehan, vice president of public policy at The ALS Association.

“This is a win for our community, but the work to protect access continues,” she added.

The ALS Association will continue to advocate with CMS to update coverage policies to ensure access to NIVs and the essential servicing provided by respiratory therapists in the future.

To learn more about the devastating impact competitive bidding would have on access to noninvasive ventilators, [read](#) a column on the subject by Tommy May, a member of The ALS Association's national board of trustees, who helped lead the effort to educate lawmakers on the issue in November.