



PRESS STATEMENT

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 16, 2022

## **CMS Opens Request to Expand Medicare Coverage of Seat Elevation Systems in Power Wheelchairs, Further Delays Consideration of Power Standing Systems**

***National Coverage Determination Request Submitted by ITEM Coalition, Supported by 60+ National Disability and Rehabilitation Organizations***

**Washington, D.C.** – Yesterday, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) opened a National Coverage Analysis (NCA) for coverage of power seat elevation systems in power wheelchairs but failed to consider Medicare coverage for power standing systems at this time. The Independence Through Enhancement of Medicare and Medicaid (ITEM) Coalition and its members are grateful for the opportunity to further express support for Medicare coverage of power seat elevation systems and strongly encourages all advocates and organizations to offer robust comments supporting coverage during the 30-day public comment period.

The ITEM Coalition is seriously concerned and disappointed with CMS' decision to delay the consideration of evidence for power standing systems, which were included as a connected benefit in the original September 2020 Request for Reconsideration of the National Coverage Determination (NCD) for Mobility Assistive Equipment (MAE). After nearly two years of waiting for this NCA to be opened, it is unacceptable that CMS has taken this course of action, and the ITEM Coalition implores CMS to open an NCA for power standing systems at the earliest possible opportunity.

The NCA on power seat elevation is now open for public comment for the next 30 days (until September 14, 2022), while the agency considers stakeholder input on whether to reconsider the NCD for MAE to provide coverage for these systems. The ITEM Coalition calls on all individuals and organizations who support access to these systems for beneficiaries with mobility impairments to share their views by visiting [www.rise4access.org](http://www.rise4access.org).

The Medicare program currently does not provide coverage of these critical benefits because Medicare contractors in 2005 determined, with no supporting clinical evidence, that they are not “primarily medical in nature” and, therefore, not included in the durable medical equipment (DME) benefit. The ITEM Coalition has long advocated for coverage due to the indisputable medical benefits of power seat elevation **and power standing systems**, especially for non-ambulatory beneficiaries. Increasing access to these systems would provide beneficiaries with more independence to perform daily activities and avoid countless complications and secondary

medical conditions. CMS announced that the agency will be considering coverage for power standing systems at an unspecified later date.

In preparing the September 2020 reconsideration request for the existing NCD, the ITEM Coalition convened dozens of experts, including power wheelchair users, clinicians, assistive technology professionals, and disability advocates to prepare a comprehensive request for Medicare to cover these systems. The request includes an exhaustive review of the clinical evidence, citing more than 120 peer-reviewed studies supporting the medical benefits for both power seat elevation and power standing systems. 60 national organizations across the disability and rehabilitation spectrum supported this request, believing this coverage is long overdue to ensure that beneficiaries with mobility impairments can live their lives as independently as possible and maintain and improve their health and function.

“In my practice, I see Medicare patients every day that require access to seat elevation and standing systems in their power wheelchairs and cannot get coverage of these benefits,” stated **Anjali Shah, M.D.**, a board-certified Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation specialist, Director of Wheelchair and Seating at UT Southwestern Medical Center, and member of the American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (AAPM&R). “Medicare’s coverage policy has a ripple effect across other payers, limiting access to these critical wheelchair technologies nationwide to those who need it most.”

“The fact that Medicare considers these benefits—which would significantly help Medicare beneficiaries—a mere convenience to the user is outdated, not supported by the evidence, and a disservice to people with mobility impairments,” stated **Peter Thomas**, co-coordinator of the ITEM Coalition and a principal at the Powers Law Firm. Co-coordinator **Joseph Nahra**, added, “The development of this request was an extensive, consensus-based process including patients, providers, medical professionals, and stakeholders across the disability and rehabilitation spectrum, and we look forward to a favorable determination by CMS.”

“My seat elevation system has greatly improved my independence and quality of life as a quadriplegic,” said **Ali Ingersoll**, an advocate with the Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation. “I am now able to raise myself up to cook food on the stove, brush my teeth at the sink, and safely transfer at a level service to my bed, among numerous other benefits. Most importantly, the ability to perform these daily functions independently greatly reduces my risk for secondary complications such as pressure sores and broken bones from transferring to and from uneven surfaces. In short, the seat elevation system in my power chair has made me a more independent and more productive member of my community.”

“I owe my life and my excellent health to my power wheelchair standing system,” said **Jim Meade** of Delta, Pennsylvania, who was diagnosed with muscular dystrophy at 14 years of age. “I stand in my wheelchair for at least an hour and a half a day, and forty-five years later, precisely due to my standing system utilizing weight bearing and gravity, my osteoporosis is reversing. Also, I am able to manage my bowel and bladder regimen independently.” Meade is affiliated with United Spinal Association.

The ITEM Coalition eagerly awaits a review and approval of this crucial request for people with disabilities. “Now is the time for Medicare – the largest health care payer in the country – to finally cover power seat elevation in power wheelchairs for the benefit of Medicare beneficiaries with

mobility disabilities,” said Peter Thomas. “We also urge Medicare to proceed expeditiously with a separate NCA for power standing systems to ensure that Medicare beneficiaries can access these necessary systems as well.”

In order to facilitate substantive public feedback, the ITEM Coalition has prepared a “one-stop shop” website to provide direction on the comment process and further information at [www.rise4access.org](http://www.rise4access.org). Advocates can find short videos of wheelchair users demonstrating these technologies and speaking to their functional and medical benefits, review suggested talking points and example comment letters, and access additional resources, including the full reconsideration request, letters of support, and more.

The ITEM Coalition is a national consumer and clinician-led coalition advocating for access to and coverage of assistive devices, technologies, and related services for persons with injuries, illnesses, disabilities, and chronic conditions of all ages. Its members represent individuals with a wide range of disabling conditions, as well as the providers who serve them, including multiple sclerosis, spinal cord injury, brain injury, stroke, paralysis, limb loss and limb difference, cerebral palsy, spina bifida, hearing, speech, and visual impairments, myositis, and other life-altering conditions. For more information, visit <https://www.itemcoalition.org/>.

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