



Improve Medicare Beneficiary Access to Genetic Counselor Services: Enact the Access to Genetic Counselor Services Act (H.R. 2144/S.1450)

Medicare beneficiaries considering genetic testing for certain conditions such as cancer, cardiovascular disease and neurological conditions, benefit from genetic counseling to help them make informed decisions about their care. Genetic counselors are experts with advanced training in medical genetics and counseling who work collaboratively as part of the medical team to offer comprehensive services to patients. They serve as one of the foundational pillars in delivering personalized medicine to patients who would benefit from genetic testing to identify specific genetic markers, prevent disease, and ensure optimal treatment.

Medicare Patients Face Genetic Counselor Access Barriers

Currently, beneficiaries face significant barriers in accessing genetic counselor services, as Medicare does not reimburse directly for the services of genetic counselors. Recent evidence also demonstrates disparities in access to genetic counselor services based on social determinants of health and geographic differences.

Value of Genetic Counselors to Medicare Beneficiaries

Evidence-based medical guidelines recognize the value and importance of genetic counselor services for patients considering or receiving genetic testing. For example, national guidelines recommend offering genetic counseling and genetic testing for:

- All individuals with pancreatic cancer
- All women with ovarian cancer
- All men with metastatic or intraductal prostate cancer
- Individuals with a certain personal and/or family histories of cancer

Genetic counselors support patients and providers as part of the medical team, offering services to: support informed consent; provide education on the benefits, risks, and limitations of genetic testing; and interpret and communicate results, helping patients understand the related medical recommendations and options. Genetic counseling services are increasingly important given the rapid advancements in genetic testing.

President's Cancer Panel Recommends Medicare Direct Reimbursement for Genetic Counselors

The benefits of genetic counselor services and access challenges faced by Medicare beneficiaries were cited in February 2022 by a high-profile panel of scientific, research and public experts—the President's Cancer Panel, part of the Cancer Moonshot effort. The Panel noted that: "Legislative changes should be made so that genetic counselors are recognized as healthcare providers by CMS. This would allow genetic counselors to contribute their specialized knowledge and skills to medical teams working to deliver high-quality care to patients at elevated risk for cancer and other diseases."

The Access to Genetic Counselor Services Act Would Improve Medicare Patient Care

A primary goal of U.S. healthcare policy is to facilitate access to healthcare innovation. There is no better way to ensure that appropriate genetic testing reaches Medicare beneficiaries than to add genetic counselors to the Medicare program with passage of H.R. 2144/S. 1450. Research shows that certified genetic counselors help ensure the right test is ordered for the right patient at the right time, which has been demonstrated to reduce inappropriate genetic test orders and lower overall healthcare costs.