



PRESS STATEMENT

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## **Congress Urges Medicare to Open Coverage Process for Power Wheelchair Standing Systems**

*Washington, D.C.* – On October 8, 2024, the Co-Chairs of the House Bipartisan Disabilities Caucus, Representatives Debbie Dingell (D-MI) and Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA), sent a Congressional sign-on letter supported by 22 House Members to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) urging the Agency to finally open a National Coverage Analysis (NCA) for coverage of standing systems in power wheelchairs that has been pending before CMS for over four years. The Independence Through Enhancement of Medicare and Medicaid (ITEM) Coalition and its member organizations are grateful to Representatives Dingell and Fitzpatrick, and the 20 Congressional cosigners, for their continued leadership and dedication in seeking Medicare coverage of standing systems in power wheelchairs.

*Members of Congress who signed on in support of the Dingell/Fitzpatrick letter include U.S. Representatives Nanette Barragán; Julia Brownley; Sean Casten; Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick; Steve Cohen; Donald Davis; Suzan DelBene; Mark DeSaulnier; Dwight Evans; Maxwell Frost; Dan Goldman; Raul Grijalva; Hank Johnson; Daniel Meuser; Eleanor Norton; Mark Pocan; Eric Swalwell; Glenn Thompson; Dina Titus; and Nikema Williams.*

The ITEM Coalition remains seriously concerned that Medicare beneficiaries are not able to access devices that allow them to stand when power wheelchairs are their only means of mobility. The clinical literature clearly demonstrates the medical and functional benefits of standing, especially for individuals who use power wheelchairs. CMS' consideration of the evidence base for coverage of power standing systems, which has been delayed since ITEM Coalition's submission of a September 2020 Request for Reconsideration of the National Coverage Determination (NCD) for Mobility Assistive Equipment (MAE), is now long overdue. After over four years of waiting for this NCA to be opened for public comment, the ITEM Coalition implores CMS to open an NCA for power standing systems at the earliest possible opportunity.

The absence of Medicare coverage for standing systems leaves many beneficiaries who use power wheelchairs without access to critical technology that can significantly improve their health outcomes, functional abilities, and quality of life. While we commend CMS for publication of its seat elevation NCD in May 2023, the omission of standing systems from

Medicare coverage falls short of fulfilling key needs of this group of Medicare beneficiaries. For individuals who spend large parts of their day in a seated position, the value of being able to stand, bear weight on the lower limbs, and allow gravity to aid in metabolic functions is well established in clinical literature. We therefore strongly urge CMS to promptly open an NCA, allowing the public to comment on this important coverage proposal.

“In my practice, I see Medicare patients every day that require access to 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 for those who need it most.”

“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 the opening for public comment of this crucial coverage request impacting people with disabilities. Medicare coverage of power seat elevation systems, which was announced in May 2023, has been warmly embraced by the Medicare population and has already significantly improved the lives of so many with mobility disabilities. “The time is now to open the standing systems NCA,” said **Peter W. Thomas**, Co-Coordinator of the ITEM Coalition. Co-Coordinator **Michael Barnett** added, “We urge Medicare to stand with beneficiaries who cannot stand for themselves and proceed expeditiously with opening an NCA for power standing systems as soon as possible.”

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 individuals with injuries, illnesses, disabilities, and chronic conditions of all ages. Its non-profit member organizations 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, and other life-altering conditions. For more information, visit <https://www.itemcoalition.org/>.