

Ohio MS Activist Achieve Victory in Restoring Wheelchair Access

MS Activists in Ohio achieved a significant victory recently when, as part of the Ohio Biennium Budget, complex wheelchairs were removed from a daily per diem provided for ancillary care in nursing facilities and returned to direct payment by Medicaid. MS Activists have been emailing, phoning and meeting with their representatives for over four years in an effort to correct an unintended consequence of a previous budget that severally limited access to complex wheelchairs. Governor John Kasich signed HB 59 removing complex wheelchairs, oxygen and transportation from bundling on June 30, 2014. New payment methods will begin January 1, 2014.

Background on Bundling

In 2009 Ohio law changed how ancillary services in nursing facilities are funded. Certain ancillary services provided to Medicaid residents in nursing facilities were to be paid for by the nursing home, where as they had been previously paid for directly from Medicaid under a “fee for service payment structure”.

As a result, the nursing facility’s per diem rate was increased to pay them directly for ancillary services needed on behalf of Medicaid residents. The per diem payment of \$3.91 was an across the board average cost estimate. This per diem was enough to cover services for some patients, but not all patients. Patients with MS have considerably greater need and higher per diem cost. Thus, facilities with a higher than average resident rate of patients with MS or other neurological diseases were unable to sufficiently provide for the complex wheelchair needs of their clients.

Background on Complex Wheelchair Needs of People with MS

While only 5-10% of persons with MS need chronic nursing home care, these needs are targeted and specialized. As compared to the frail elderly nursing home resident, residents with MS in nursing homes tend to:

- Be younger
- Be more mentally alert
- Be more physically dependent
- Present with more symptoms of depression and have longer lengths of stay

As a result customized rehabilitation mobility equipment, including sophisticated motorized wheelchairs with complex seating, are often a necessary component in maintaining the quality of life of a person with MS. These devices are needed to:

- Improve comfort, independence, and mobility
- Prevent secondary complications such as skin breakdown, postural deformities/contractures, and compromised breathing