

UPDATE

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Neurosurgeons Applaud Introduction of Legislation to Streamline Prior Authorization in Medicare *Bipartisan, bicameral legislation would bring needed reform to the Medicare Advantage Program*

Washington, DC—Today, the American Association of Neurological Surgeons (AANS) and the Congress of Neurological Surgeons (CNS) enthusiastically voiced support for the *Improving Seniors' Timely Access to Care Act*. Sponsored by Sens. **Roger Marshall**, MD, (R-Kan.), **Kyrsten Sinema** (D-Ariz.) and **John Thune** (R-S.D.), the legislation would protect patients in Medicare Advantage from unnecessary prior authorization practices that limit their timely access to medically necessary care. Earlier this year, Reps. **Suzan DelBene** (D-Wash.), **Mike Kelly** (R-Pa.), **Ami Bera**, MD, (D-Calif.) and **Larry Bucshon**, MD, (R-Ind.) introduced identical legislation ([H.R. 3173](#)) in the House, which now has 235 co-sponsors.

Prior authorization is a cumbersome process that requires physicians to obtain pre-approval for medical treatments or tests before rendering care to their patients. The process for obtaining this approval is burdensome and costly to physician practices, requiring physicians and their staff to spend an enormous amount of time each week negotiating with insurance companies. As a result, patients are now experiencing significant barriers to medically necessary care, even for treatments and tests that are eventually routinely approved.

A [survey](#) of neurosurgeons found that prior authorization is delaying access to necessary care. Wait times for prior authorization can be lengthy — typically taking between 2 to 14 days, but sometimes from 15 to more than 31 days. Prior authorization hassles can also cause patients to abandon treatment altogether. Finally, the survey demonstrated prior authorization has a negative impact on patient clinical outcomes.

“Prior authorization is another tactic that health plans are using to cut costs, but its rampant overuse is now causing inappropriate delays and denials of medical treatments that our seniors need,” said **John K. Ratliff**, MD, FAANS, a practicing neurosurgeon at Stanford University, and chair of the AANS/CNS Washington Committee. “Our patients suffer from painful and life-threatening neurologic conditions such as brain tumors, debilitating degenerative spine disorders, stroke and Parkinson’s Disease. Without timely medical care, our patients often face permanent neurologic damage, and sometimes death.”

To bring needed transparency and oversight to the Medicare Advantage program, the AANS and the CNS have joined forces with the [Regulatory Relief Coalition](#) — a group of national physician specialty organizations advocating for a reduction in Medicare program regulatory burdens to protect patients’ timely access to care — to advance the *Improving Seniors' Timely Access to Care Act*.

“Given the significant bipartisan support for this legislation in both the Senate and House, Congress should pass this bill this year for the betterment of our patients,” Dr. Ratliff concluded.

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The American Association of Neurological Surgeons (AANS), founded in 1931, and the Congress of Neurological Surgeons (CNS), founded in 1951, are the two largest scientific and educational associations for neurosurgical professionals in the world. These groups represent over 8,000 neurosurgeons worldwide. Neurological surgery is the medical specialty concerned with the prevention, diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation of disorders that affect the entire nervous system, including the spinal column, spinal cord, brain and peripheral nerves. For more information, please visit www.aans.org or www.cns.org, read our blog www.neurosurgeryblog.org, follow us on [Twitter](#) or connect with us on [Facebook](#).