



Choices for Increased Mobility Act of 2024 – Senate Legislation to Improve Access for Carbon Fiber and Titanium Wheelchairs in Medicare

Summary - The Choices for Increased Mobility Act would allow Medicare beneficiaries to access manual wheelchairs constructed with carbon fiber and titanium materials, with minimal government financial commitment. Current Medicare policy requires beneficiaries to pay up front, out-of-pocket, the entire cost of titanium and carbon fiber wheelchairs and wait for Medicare to reimburse the covered portion for a wheelchair with standard features. Many beneficiaries do not have the financial means to cover such costs.

The Choices for Increased Mobility Act would allow Medicare beneficiaries to upgrade to ultra-lightweight wheelchairs by creating two new HCPCS codes for the base manual wheelchairs and titanium/carbon fiber wheelchairs. This would also allow CMS an opportunity to reconsider the coding of ultra-light wheelchairs and the additional cost of this new technology. Establishing new codes would ultimately give access to Medicare beneficiaries to the ultra-light wheelchairs they need both now and in the future. This budget-neutral bill would allow beneficiaries a much more reasonable path to choose a wheelchair that is significantly lighter and more functional than what Medicare pays for.

Senator Marsha Blackburn (R—TN) plans to introduce The Choices for Increased Mobility Act to allow upgrades for titanium and carbon fiber wheelchairs. AAHomecare strongly urges Senators to co-sponsor this important legislation. Senate offices can contact Senator Blackburn’s office to become an original co-sponsor.

Background - Complex Rehab Technology (CRT) is a small subset of the DME benefit comprised of highly configurable manual wheelchairs, power wheelchairs, adaptive seating and positioning systems, and includes uniquely manufactured wheelchair materials like carbon fiber and titanium.

Manual wheelchairs constructed with carbon fiber and titanium utilize a stronger, lighter material than the standard aluminum lightweight wheelchairs. Decreased overall weight helps prevent shoulder breakdown (injury) when self-propelling and offers increased ease of maneuverability and transport. There are significant benefits for individuals who utilize wheelchairs with these advanced materials, including decreased overall pain, stress to the shoulder joint, and fatigue.

When the Medicare HCPCS code for ultra-lightweight manual wheelchairs (K0005) was established in 1993, the cost of materials like titanium and carbon fiber was not factored into the payment amount as those materials were not yet being utilized for wheelchairs. It has since been confirmed that CMS did not have any documentation related to those materials between 1992 and 1997. Without those additional costs being included, CRT providers have been unable to supply chairs constructed with upgraded materials at the fee schedule amounts determined by Medicare and many other payers.

Historically, Medicare policy language permitted beneficiaries who met medical necessity requirements for an ultra-lightweight manual wheelchair to “upgrade” their equipment further by only paying the difference between the standard materials (aluminum) and the lighter, stronger ones (titanium or carbon fiber). However, in 2016, Medicare changed its policy without any clear statutory justification, prohibiting beneficiaries from doing so and indicating that the option to upgrade was not necessary. As a result, the only way beneficiaries have been able to obtain titanium or carbon fiber wheelchairs is to prepay the entire cost of the wheelchair out-of-pocket and wait for Medicare to reimburse for the standard-material portion of the wheelchair. Unquestionably, this



cost-prohibitive change has negatively affected consumer access to lighter, more durable wheelchairs ever since.

The Choices for Increased Mobility Act aims to eliminate cost barriers by requiring Medicare to create a separate HCPCS code for specialized materials used in wheelchairs, such as titanium and carbon fiber, allowing beneficiaries to pay only for the upgraded materials instead of the entire wheelchair out-of-pocket. Additionally, this measure would pave the way for other insurance plans to cover the out-of-pocket costs for upgraded materials. Presently, providing a titanium or carbon fiber wheelchair requires the claim to be processed as non-assigned, which secondary insurance plans and Medicaid do not cover.

Solution -Individuals with disabilities should have the right to choose and cover the costs of specialized materials for their wheelchair. Restoring this option would not remove medical necessity requirements for the wheelchair itself and would not result in any additional costs to Medicare. CMS should permit individuals to make the choice as to whether a titanium or carbon fiber chair would be best for them. The Choices for Increased Mobility Act will improve access to titanium/carbon fiber wheelchairs in Medicare.

Example: Beneficiary Financial Responsibility for K0005 Titanium/Carbon Fiber Chair

	Current Method	Proposed Method
WHEELCHAIR BASE		
K0005 Wheelchair Base (\$3,000 Allowable)		
80% Medicare Allowable	\$2,400	\$0
20% Beneficiary Co-Pay	\$600	\$600
Additional Cost of Specialized Materials	\$1,000	\$1,000
Subtotal Base Chair Up-Front Costs:	\$4,000	\$1,600
MEDICALLY NECESSARY ACCESSORIES & SEATING		
Accessories/Seating (\$700 Allowable) ¹		
80% Medicare Allowable	\$560	0
20% Beneficiary Co-Pay	\$140	\$140
Subtotal Accessories/Seating Up-Front Costs:	\$700	\$140
TOTAL Wheelchair Up-Front Costs:	\$4,700	\$1,740

¹ Medically necessary accessories and seating components used for this comparison: seat cushion, back cushion, adjustable height armrests.