



AMERICAN  
SPEECH-LANGUAGE-  
HEARING  
ASSOCIATION

September 21, 2009

The Honorable Max Baucus  
Chairman  
Senate Finance Committee  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Grassley  
Ranking Member  
Senate Finance Committee  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Baucus and Ranking Member Grassley:

On behalf of the American Speech-Language Hearing Association (ASHA), I urge you to define habilitative services as a basic benefit in the Finance Committee health care reform proposal. ASHA is the professional and scientific association representing more than 135,000 speech-language pathologists, audiologists, and speech, language and hearing scientists. Our organization is concerned that absent a clear mandate for the coverage of habilitative services, private health insurance companies will continue to perpetuate their discriminatory practices of dumping children with medically-necessary communication disorders on our public schools.

Under the current system, health insurance policies will attempt to deny coverage of speech-language pathology and audiology services identified with communication disorders. Although many communication disorders are medical in nature and are caused by a neurological injury or dysfunction that affects the acquisition of communication skills, frequently insurance policies label these disorders as a developmental delay and educational in nature. Ironically, private insurers usually provide coverage for rehabilitative services for children who incur cognitive or physically-based disorders as a result of an injury or illness, but deny those same services for children who are born with cognitive or communication disorders. This makes no sense and is really no different than denying health care coverage to adults with pre-existing medical conditions, except children are the targets of the discriminatory insurance practices.

The Senate Finance mark already recognizes the importance of habilitative services to Medicaid beneficiaries and SCHIP recipients by requiring that states ensure that children under these programs have access to early intervention services as those mandated under Medicaid's Early Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment (EPSDT) regulations. Why should children of parent's with private insurance receive less? We respectfully request the Senate Finance Committee to specifically define habilitative services in the basic benefit package and conform to the basic benefit packages adopted in the Senate HELP health care reform proposal and in H.R. 3200.

By requiring health plans to cover habilitative services, children with communication disorders would have greater access to speech and hearing services. Early and appropriate intervention can mitigate the need for intensive services in the future, thereby reducing costs and improving the overall health and wellbeing of the child, as well as providing greater opportunities for success as they become adults. Should you have any questions regarding this issue, please contact Ingrida Lusic, ASHA's Director of Federal and Political Advocacy, at 202-624-5951 or via email at [ilusic@asha.org](mailto:ilusic@asha.org).

Sincerely,

Sue T. Hale, MCD  
President

2200 RESEARCH BOULEVARD  
ROCKVILLE, MD 20850-3289  
301-296-5700 VOICE or TTY  
FAX 301-296-8577

[www.asha.org](http://www.asha.org)

444 NORTH CAPITOL STREET, NW  
SUITE 715  
WASHINGTON, DC 20001  
FAX 202-624-5955