



PRESS STATEMENT

Contact: Joe Nahra

Joseph.Nahra@PowersLaw.com

202-349-4243

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 18, 2020

**ITEM Coalition Calls for CMS to Expand Medicare Coverage of
Seat Elevation and Standing Systems in Power Wheelchairs**
*Formal request submitted for National Coverage Determination supported by 60
national rehabilitation and disability organizations*

Washington, D.C. – The Independence Through Enhancement of Medicare and Medicaid (ITEM) Coalition submitted a formal request for reconsideration of the Medicare National Coverage Determination (NCD) for Mobility Assistive Equipment (MAE) this week to ensure that beneficiaries with mobility impairments have access to seat elevation and standing systems in power wheelchairs.

The Medicare program currently does not provide coverage of these critical benefits because Medicare contractors in 2005 determined, with no supporting clinical evidence, that they are not “primarily medical in nature” and, therefore, not included in the durable medical equipment (DME) benefit. The ITEM Coalition has long advocated for coverage due to the indisputable medical benefits of power standing and power seat elevation, especially for non-ambulatory beneficiaries. Increasing access to these systems would provide beneficiaries with more independence to perform daily activities and avoid countless complications and secondary medical conditions.

The ITEM Coalition convened dozens of experts, including power wheelchair users, clinicians, assistive technology professionals, and disability advocates to prepare a comprehensive NCD request for Medicare to cover these systems. The request includes an exhaustive review of the clinical evidence, citing more than 120 peer-reviewed studies supporting the medical benefits for power seat elevation and power standing systems. 60 national organizations across the disability and rehabilitation spectrum support this request, believing this coverage is long overdue to ensure that beneficiaries with mobility impairments can live their lives as independently as possible and maintain and improve their health and function.

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

“The fact that Medicare considers these benefits—which would significantly help Medicare beneficiaries—a mere convenience to the user is outdated, not supported by the evidence, and a disservice to people with mobility impairments,” stated **Peter Thomas**, co-coordinator of the ITEM Coalition and a principal at the Powers Law Firm. Co-coordinator **Joseph Nahra**, added, “The development of this request was an extensive, consensus-based process including patients, providers, medical professionals, and stakeholders across the disability and rehabilitation spectrum, and we look forward to a favorable determination by CMS.”

“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.

“My seat elevation system has greatly improved my independence and quality of life as a quadriplegic,” added **Ali Ingersoll**, an advocate with the Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation. “I am now able to raise myself up to cook food on the stove, brush my teeth at the sink, and safely transfer at a level service to my bed, among numerous other benefits. Most importantly, the ability to perform these daily functions independently greatly reduces my risk for secondary complications such as pressure sores and broken bones from transferring to and from uneven surfaces. In short, the seat elevation system in my power chair has made me a more independent and more productive member of my community.”

The ITEM Coalition eagerly awaits a review and approval of this crucial request for people with disabilities. “Now is the time for Medicare – the largest health care payer in the country – to finally cover power seat elevation and power standing systems in power wheelchairs for the benefit of Medicare beneficiaries with mobility disabilities,” said Peter Thomas.

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 persons with injuries, illnesses, disabilities, and chronic conditions of all ages. Its members 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, myositis, and other life-altering conditions. For more information, visit <https://www.itemcoalition.org/>.

Please contact Joe Nahra for more information at 202-349-4243 or at joseph.nahra@powerslaw.com.

###