



PRESS STATEMENT

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Timely Wheelchair Repairs and Maintenance: A Key Priority for the ITEM Coalition

Washington, D.C., February 5, 2025 – 41 members of the Independence Through Enhancement of Medicare and Medicaid (“ITEM”) Coalition¹ (<https://itemcoalition.org/>), a national consumer- and clinician-led group of national nonprofit associations², are calling on policymakers to address a set of policy recommendations to remove the longstanding barriers that prevent individuals with mobility disabilities from receiving timely and consistent manual and power wheelchair repairs and maintenance. These delays and inefficiencies have created ongoing, unnecessary barriers for individuals who rely on wheelchairs for mobility.

Wheelchairs—especially complex rehabilitative technology (CRT) manual and power wheelchairs—are essential for millions of individuals with mobility disabilities, enabling them to perform daily activities, improve their functional status, live as independently as possible, and participate fully in their communities. However, Medicare coverage policies, and many other health care payers, have made it increasingly difficult for individuals to obtain necessary repairs and maintenance, often forcing people with disabilities to put their lives on hold when their mobility device breaks down, wasting time, resources, and productivity for all parties involved. Health care coverage policies must be improved so these individuals are not sidelined for days and weeks on end when their wheelchair fails.

“There is strong support to take steps to solve this problem from all those affected by this problem, including consumers, clinicians, and suppliers,” stated Peter W. Thomas, ITEM Coalition Co-Coordinator. “In fact, the only resistance to our proposals were from those who felt we needed to go farther in our recommendations to solve this critical problem for people with disabilities.”

There are many reasons a wheelchair may need to be repaired through a combination of health care providers, including CRT suppliers, as well as occupational or physical therapists. In addition, geographic diversity in the states and the capacity of various suppliers make one-size-fits-all approaches difficult. This contributes to the complexity of this multifaceted issue, requiring multiple solutions to ensure timely repairs for consumers. The ITEM Coalition has outlined a series of proposed solutions to help address this pressing issue:

¹ A full list of organizations endorsing these recommendations is below.

² <https://itemcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/item-coalition-wheelchair-repairs-and-maintenance-policy-recommendations.pdf> v

1. **Coverage and Payment for Preventative Maintenance for CRT Manual and power Wheelchairs:** Medicare and other payers must recognize the necessity of routine maintenance for CRT wheelchairs, just as they do for other medical devices like prosthetic limbs and orthotic braces. This would help prevent costly and dangerous equipment failures.
2. **Require suppliers to repair the devices they provide in a timely manner:** All CRT suppliers should be required to repair the wheelchairs they provide in a timely manner, ensuring consumers are not left without essential mobility devices for prolonged periods of time.
3. **Suppliers should provide appropriate “temporary replacement” chairs that are in good working order while repairs are being made:** When repairs require extended servicing times, suppliers must make every effort to provide temporary replacement wheelchairs to the individual. But temporary wheelchairs during repairs should not be considered viable long-term substitutes. Payers should cover backup complex manual wheelchairs or maintain coverage for repairs on expired CRT wheelchairs to serve as emergency substitutes.
4. **Reduce delays caused by prior authorization and additional insurance documentation requirements:** Medicare and other payers should cover repairs for patient-owned CRT wheelchairs without requiring prior authorization, excessive medical documentation, or a physician’s prescription. Since the medical necessity of the wheelchair has already been established, these bureaucratic hurdles create unnecessary delays, waste resources, and discourage suppliers from agreeing to make required repairs.
5. **Alleviate financial burdens on consumers and systemic challenges in supplier reimbursement:** Without adequate Medicare and private payer coverage for wheelchair repairs, individuals often face high out-of-pocket costs, forcing them to delay or attempt makeshift repairs, which can increase avoidable injury risks and reduce functionality. To improve access, coverage policies should:
 1. Reimburse suppliers for the time they travel to access a device in a patient’s home, evaluate and diagnose needed repairs, and provide specialized labor to ensure quality service.
 2. Establish clear communication channels for repair options and timelines. These changes would help ensure timely, safe, and efficient repairs for individuals with mobility disabilities.
6. **Establish the right of beneficiaries to self-repair their own mobility device:** Individuals using CRT wheelchairs should be permitted to self-repair certain components and purchase parts directly from manufacturers to expedite the repair process. Simple

repairs should not void warranties, but complex components requiring programming or clinical involvement should be provided by qualified suppliers.

Alexandra Bennewith, Vice President, Government Relations, United Spinal Association stated “Wheelchair users across the country have continued to experience significant wheelchair repair and service delays for far too long impacting their ability to live their lives to the fullest in their own communities. Delays in service and repair can lead to serious injury and harm and we appreciate anyone interested in working with us to solve this unnecessary problem for the benefit of the members we serve and the 5.5 million wheelchair users in the United States.”

States are already beginning to take action on this issue, and the ITEM Coalition encourages Congress to address this issue with respect to the health care programs over which it has jurisdiction, namely, Medicare, Medicaid, and the Veterans Health Administration. A national standard for wheelchair repair and maintenance would help ensure consistent, equitable access to wheelchair repairs across the country.

Michael Barnett, Co-Coordinator of the ITEM Coalition, stated that “The ITEM Coalition’s wheelchair repairs and maintenance policy recommendations are intended to be used as a starting point for states and other advocacy groups to build on in crafting their own solutions to this problem.”

The ITEM Coalition continues to advocate for these crucial policy changes and invites stakeholders, legislators, and the public to join in supporting solutions that prioritize mobility, independence, and dignity for individuals with disabilities.

For media inquiries, please contact: Michael Barnett, ITEM Coalition Co-Coordinator, at Michael.Barnett@PowersLaw.com or call 202-466-6550.

The Following ITEM Coalition Members Signed-On In Support of the Policy Recommendations:

Access Ready, Inc.

ACCSES

Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

All Wheels Up

ALS Association

American Academy of Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation

American Association for Homecare

American Association on Health and Disability

American Congress of Rehabilitation Medicine

American Macular Degeneration Foundation

American Music Therapy Association

American Occupational Therapy Association

American Physical Therapy Association

American Therapeutic Recreation Association

Amputee Coalition
Association of Assistive Technology Act Programs
Association of Rehabilitation Nurses
Autistic Women & Nonbinary Network
The Buoniconti Fund to Cure Paralysis
Clinician Task Force
Child Neurology Foundation
Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation
CureLGMD2i Foundation
Cure SMA
3DA
Epilepsy Foundation of America
Institute for Matching Person and Technology
International Registry of Rehabilitation Technology Suppliers
Lakeshore Foundation
Long Island Center for Independent Living
The Miami Project to Cure Paralysis
Muscular Dystrophy Association
National Association for the Advancement of Orthotics and Prosthetics
National Multiple Sclerosis Society
NCART
Rifton Equipment
Spina Bifida Association
Team Gleason
The Viscardi Center
United Cerebral Palsy
United Spinal Association