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AAHomecare Rallies Behind Bill To Delay Some Competitive Bidding, Lobbies WH

By Sigi Ris / October 19, 2026 at 6:50 PM

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Durable medical equipment (DME) advocates at the American Association for Homecare are rallying behind new bipartisan legislation that would block CMS from including urology and ostomy products in competitive bidding, as they simultaneously lobby the White House and HHS to act administratively. The group hopes to secure the same legislation for continuous glucose monitors and insulin pumps.

Reps. Greg Murphy (R-NC) and Brad Schneider (D-IL) recently introduced the Access to Medical Supplies Act (H.R. 10787), which would require CMS to pause the inclusion of urology and ostomy products from the DME competitive bidding program for five years. Murphy and Schneider both sit on the House Ways & Means Committee.

AAHomecare worked with lawmakers on the bill and in a release called the bill “the next step” in preventing harm to patient access that the organization argues could occur because of the program.

Aside from pushing for the bill’s passage when lawmakers return after the midterm elections, AAHomecare also recently met with the White House, HHS and the Small Business Administration to seek administrative delays, according to the organization.

AAHomecare noted the new bipartisan bill would create a technical expert panel to study the impact of adding urology and ostomy products to the competitive bidding, as well as a demonstration program to test the effects before CMS makes a final decision.

“Before CMS enacts a program that reshapes how patients receive highly personalized medical supplies, it should understand exactly what is at stake,” AAHomecare CEO Tom Ryan said in a release. “Reps. Murphy and Schneider's bipartisan bill allows CMS to study the impact, test it, and hear from patients and providers before making changes that could disrupt access across the country. We urge every member of Congress to support this bill and protect patient access.”

In the organization’s newsletter last Wednesday (Oct. 14), Ryan urged AAHomecare members to urge lawmakers to support the bill.

Patient and home care supplier advocates have been pushing for CMS to delay parts of the competitive bidding program since the agency finalized its home health rule last year. The rule established the Remote Item Delivery model, which creates a single nationwide competition rather than separate competitions across geographic areas, according to AAHomecare. Winners and rates are to be announced next year, and the program is slated to take effect in 2028.

Advocates argue the program would result in suppliers being forced to create cheaper products and leave patients with fewer product choices, resulting in increased hospitalizations and subsequent costs. Before the bill was unveiled, AAHomecare members were encouraged to talk to their representatives about the challenges they face in the competitive bidding program.

According to ostomy patient advocates at the United Ostomy Associations of America (UOAA), ostomy products are highly individualized to meet the patient’s specific needs and are not a one-size-fit-all.

Including ostomy products in competitive bidding, UOAA says, will reduce innovation and reduce consumer choice, potentially resulting in patient illness due to ill-fitting products.

“Everybody's body is very different, and some of these stomas end up in very difficult locations, and so we need flexible products, we need rigid products, we need convex products,” Joanna Burgess-Stocks, an ostomy nurse and patient and a co-chair on UOAA’s Advocacy Committee, told *Inside Health Policy*.

“If people do not have a choice in their product, they could get leakage, and particularly in in situations where somebody has a urostomy or a more liquid effluent like an ileostomy, which is from the small intestine, it's a looser stool -- that in particular is like battery acid on your skin,” Burgess-Stocks added. “So if your product isn't working and you get constant leakage, you are eroding your skin away. And some of these people end up in the hospital with infections and things like that.”

Nearly half of durable medical equipment suppliers impacted by the upcoming round of competitive bidding reported to AAHomecare they'll face at least one significant business viability like reduced operations or closures if the suppliers failed to receive a bid.

AAHomecare argues competitive bidding would especially impact smaller, community-based suppliers. -- *Sigi Ris* (sris@iwpnews.com)

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