

Streamlining Wheelchair Repairs

BACKGROUND

Our wheelchair is our legs. It allows us to lead our lives. If we cannot use our wheelchair because it needs a repair, our daily activity stops. Because we use our wheelchairs every day, often up to 16 hours a day, and because Medicare and insurance providers require our wheelchairs to have a useful life of up to five years, wheelchair repairs are an inevitable part of being a wheelchair user.

When we obtain a new wheelchair, a medical prescription and prior authorization are required. Clinicians customize the wheelchair to fulfill our individual medical and functional needs. Our wheelchairs can cost tens of thousands of dollars and replacement parts are equally expensive. These factors, and a variety of others, very often delay repairs. These delays threaten our health, our safety and our basic daily activities.

A [survey study](#) of individuals with a spinal cord injury, who use medically prescribed and individually customized wheelchairs with complex rehab technology (CRT), found that **the median time to repair a wheelchair was 14 days. The longest was 6 months, the entire length of the study period.** Additionally, “nearly a quarter of participants reported having unmet repair needs with not all needed repairs completed.”

In their conclusion citing an earlier study, researchers added, “Further, individuals who experience consequences secondary to breakdowns have 1.73 times greater odds of pressure injuries, 1.81 times greater odds of rehospitalization, and worsened pain.” Finally, researchers concluded that the current provider-dependent repair process, “seems to indicate structural inadequacies within the repair process and the need for interventions to address these issues.” We agree and we believe that it is urgent that Congress acts to streamline the wheelchair repair process with the following planned legislation.

REQUEST FOR MEMBERS OF CONGRESS

Sponsored by **Senator Tammy Duckworth** (D-IL) and **Representative John B. Larson** (D-CT-01), please support legislation these members of Congress plan to introduce. We support including provisions that would:

- **Remove prior authorization requirements for Medicare Advantage Plans for CRT repair.** Since prior authorization is required to purchase a wheelchair, requiring it again for **every** repair is unnecessary red tape. It delays repairs significantly, often by weeks. Medicare has ended prior authorization for repairs. Medicare Advantage plans should as well. States should end similar requirements with their Medicaid programs.
- **Create a model to evaluate the benefits/costs of covering preventive maintenance.** Provide a multiyear model of routine preventative maintenance services for medically prescribed, individually customized wheelchairs. Evaluate if the model produces less wait times, fewer repairs and lower costs. Include testing, adjusting, regulating, inspecting, and other services to maintain technology. The wheelchair industry recognizes the value of preventive maintenance to all stakeholders involved; please see [repair guidelines](#) they have developed.
- **Reimburse wheelchair repair technicians’ transportation costs.** Payment for the time that certified repair technicians spend traveling to our home to diagnose needed repairs or for preventive maintenance and to provide service and repair services. This would support the cost of our obtaining needed repairs or preventive maintenance at home for a wheelchair that is, or soon may be, inoperable.
- **Keep us informed.** Provide us an expected timeline for repairs. If our wheelchair cannot be repaired at our home, can a loaner wheelchair be provided?
- **Build a list of wheelchair components that we can repair, or have repaired, ourselves.** Consult advocacy organizations and wheelchair providers to provide guidance on which wheelchair components we can repair or have repaired by someone other than our wheelchair provider. This is also an opportunity for more businesses, such as bike shops, to expand into wheelchair repairs.