



July 7, 2011

The Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader
United States Senate

The Honorable John A. Boehner
Speaker of the House
United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives

Dear Speaker Boehner, Majority Leader Reid, Leader McConnell and Leader Pelosi:

We understand the critical decisions you must make on the debt ceiling and on making tough budget choices, examining items of both big and small budget impact.

One item of relatively small budget impact that we would like to explain to you is why diabetics should be able to continue to purchase diabetic testing supplies (DTS) from retail pharmacies instead of just via the Medicare competitive bidding program (CBP). The diabetic condition is potentially very volatile and environmental variations may cause more immediate needs for DTS that can only be served by retail pharmacies, rather than awaiting the arrival of a mail order package. Additionally, retail pharmacists consult often with diabetic customers, potentially saving them from severe complications that would dramatically escalate the cost of care. We urge you to consider this and resist efforts that would prevent diabetics from purchasing DTS from their retail pharmacy.

Community pharmacists play a critical role in improved health outcomes and reducing overall healthcare costs, and according to a recent Gallup survey are seen as one of the most highly trusted, highly accessible, neighborhood healthcare experts. Services provided by community pharmacists are an essential part of improving patient compliance, improving the delivery of healthcare services, improving quality and outcomes, and are a cost effective and convenient way to prevent illness and reduce healthcare costs to the Medicare and Medicaid programs.

Medicare patients with diabetes rely heavily on local retail pharmacies for prescription medications and diabetes testing supplies. Pharmacists help seniors with diabetes understand the best way to use their diabetes testing equipment and are uniquely positioned to help identify changes in patients' conditions that may require additional referral and treatment. This coordinated care is vital to seniors with diabetes, helping them manage their disease, navigating through the various options available to them, and preventing more costly interventions.

In 2003, Congress created the Medicare Part B competitive bidding program for durable medical equipment. While DTS are considered DME under the Medicare program, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) has intentionally and wisely excluded DTS furnished by retail pharmacies from competitive bidding thereby ensuring accessibility to these vital supplies when a diabetic patient needs them.

We strongly support this policy. Retail pharmacies are a critical access point for Medicare beneficiaries with diabetes. Forty percent of all seniors with diabetes currently obtain their DTS from retail pharmacy locations. This allows seniors to obtain all the equipment and prescription drugs they need to manage their diabetes from a single source, i.e. a local pharmacy when they need it.

Ending the retail pharmacy exclusion from CBP would be a major mistake. This would significantly reduce access to local pharmacies as a source of care. Limiting access to supplies and pharmacist consultation will lead to under-testing, decreased medication adherence, poorer outcomes and increased costs. Pharmacists help seniors select and most effectively use the best supplies and provide initial instruction and reinforcement on their appropriate use. This professional support originates from the ongoing relationship between beneficiaries and pharmacists. Similarly, reducing reimbursement rates for retail DTS would also hurt access to care, since payments that do not offer a reasonable return on investment will prove a disincentive to participation in the program.

We urge Congress to maintain the current exclusion in the competitive bidding program for all retail pharmacies providing diabetes testing supplies for Medicare beneficiaries. We further urge that Congress prevent any action that would reduce the current reimbursement levels for retail diabetes supplies.

We thank you for your leadership on these critically important healthcare issues and we look forward to continuing to work you on policies that improve health outcomes and reduce overall healthcare costs.

Sincerely,

**American Pharmacists Association
Food Marketing Institute
National Alliance of State Pharmacy Associations
National Association of Chain Drug Stores**

cc: Members of the 112th Congress