

UPDATE

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Neurosurgeons Applaud Lawmakers on their Efforts to Streamline Prior Authorization in Medicare

New survey data confirms the need for prior authorization reform to ensure seniors' timely access to care.

Washington, DC—Today, the American Association of Neurological Surgeons (AANS) and the Congress of Neurological Surgeons (CNS) enthusiastically voiced support for [H.R. 3107](#), the Improving Seniors' Timely Access to Care Act. Sponsored by Reps. **Suzan DelBene** (D-Wash.); **Mike Kelly** (R-Pa.); **Roger Marshall**, MD, (R-Kan.); and **Ami Bera**, MD, (D-Calif.), the legislation would protect patients in Medicare Advantage from unnecessary prior authorization practices that limit their timely access to medically necessary care. The bill is based on a neurosurgery-supported [consensus statement](#) on prior authorization, which was developed by leading national organizations representing physicians, hospitals and health plans.

Prior authorization is a cumbersome process that requires physicians to obtain pre-approval for medical treatments or tests before rendering care to their patients. The process for obtaining this approval is burdensome and costly to physician practices, requiring physicians and their staff to spend an enormous amount of time each week negotiating with insurance companies. As a result, patients are now experiencing significant barriers to medically necessary care, even for treatments and tests that are eventually routinely approved.

A [survey](#) of neurosurgeons released this week by the AANS and the CNS found the following:

- Eighty-two percent of respondents state that prior authorization either always (34%) or often (49%) delays access to necessary care.
- The wait time for prior authorization can be lengthy. For most neurosurgeons (67%) it takes between 2 to 14 days to obtain prior authorization, but for 22%, this process can take from 15 to more than 31 days.
- Prior authorization causes patients to abandon treatment altogether with 21% reporting that patients often abandon treatment and 60% reporting that patients sometimes abandon treatment.
- Overwhelmingly (88%), neurosurgeons report that prior authorization has a significant (37%) or somewhat (51%) negative impact on patient clinical outcomes.
- Ninety-one percent of neurosurgeons report that the burden associated with prior authorization has significantly increased over the past five years.

“Prior authorization is the latest tactic that health plans are using to cut costs, but its rampant overuse is now causing inappropriate delays and denials of medical treatments that our seniors need,” said **Ann R. Stroink**, MD, FAANS, a practicing neurosurgeon from Bloomington, Illinois, and chair of the AANS/CNS Washington Committee.

Dr. Stroink added, “Neurosurgeons like me take care of very sick patients who suffer from painful and life-threatening neurologic conditions such as brain tumors, debilitating degenerative spine disorders, stroke and Parkinson’s Disease. Without timely medical care, our patients often face permanent neurologic damage, and sometimes death.”

To bring needed transparency and oversight to the Medicare Advantage program, the AANS and the CNS have joined forces with the [Regulatory Relief Coalition](#) — a group of national physician specialty organizations advocating for a reduction in Medicare program regulatory burdens to protect patients’ timely access to care — to advance the Improving Seniors’ Timely Access to Care Act.

“The AANS and the CNS look forward to working with Congress and the Administration to advance bipartisan legislation that will protect patients from unnecessary prior authorization, and we commend these legislative leaders for their efforts to rethink the entire prior authorization process for the betterment of our patients,” Dr. Stroink concluded.

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The American Association of Neurological Surgeons (AANS), founded in 1931, and the Congress of Neurological Surgeons (CNS), founded in 1951, are the two largest scientific and educational associations for neurosurgical professionals in the world. These groups represent over 8,000 neurosurgeons worldwide. Neurological surgery is the medical specialty concerned with the prevention, diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation of disorders that affect the entire nervous system, including the spinal column, spinal cord, brain and peripheral nerves. For more information, please visit www.aans.org or www.cns.org, read our blog www.neurosurgeryblog.org, follow us on [Twitter](#) or connect with us on [Facebook](#).