



2019 ACB Legislative Imperatives

The American Council of the Blind (ACB) is the nation's leading grassroots consumer organization for individuals who are blind and visually impaired. With 70 state and special-interest affiliates across the country, ACB is committed to promoting independence and opportunity for Americans who are blind, and ACB stands committed to advocacy that lifts up our values.

Americans are currently at the start of a transformative time in history regarding blindness and vision loss. On one end of the spectrum, technology is making massive improvements toward augmenting the loss of sight for individuals who are blind; at the same time, researchers and practitioners race the clock as the Baby Boomers live longer into retirement and changing demographics in our country all contribute to what will be a significant rise in the prevalence of blindness over the next 30 years¹. Therefore, ACB urges Congress to work with advocates, scholars, and policymakers toward crafting a long-term agenda that will secure independence for millions of Americans experiencing vision loss and blindness. The following legislative imperatives represent several key issues in the 116th Congress ACB believes will help us on our road to full independence and participation in our society.

Securing Independence for Medicare Beneficiaries

For a decade now, Medicare has refused to cover the cost of low-vision aids, due to an eyeglasses exclusion that prohibits the purchase of any durable medical good with a lens. While the regulatory exclusion was seen as cost saving by not covering eyeglasses, it has had negative impact on those who, through the use of special low-vision aids, could significantly increase their independence in the home. ACB believes that simple adaptive low-vision aids can have a significant impact on an individual's ability to remain independent in the home. Such personal independence can have long-lasting effects toward aging in place, rather than have to pursue costlier institutional or assisted living care.

ACB calls on Congress to re-introduce the Medicare Demonstration of Coverage of Low Vision Devices Act, which would measure the various costs and benefits of removing the Medicare eyeglass exclusion. This bipartisan legislation is a smart approach toward finding workable solutions that help seniors age in place.

¹ Centers for Disease Control's Vision Health Initiative. "The Burden of Vision Loss." Accessed February 21st, 2017 at: <https://www.cdc.gov/visionhealth/risk/burden.htm>

Pushing Forward with the Development of Autonomous Vehicles

We are now at an exciting technological place when it comes to transportation. The potential for the use of autonomous vehicles for people who are blind is closer than ever. Such vehicles are already being tested in multiple cities. However, it is critical that these cars remain fully accessible, and that individuals who have the most to gain through such technology are not forgotten.

In the 116th Congress, blindness organizations and the auto industry supported legislation that would establish working groups to focus on accessibility and prevent discrimination in operating such vehicles based on disability. ACB calls on the 116th Congress to move forward with similar legislation that will continue to drive this technology forward.

Procuring Accessible Durable Medical Equipment

Advancements in health technology have resulted in a watershed of durable medical equipment (DME) that monitors vital health activity and conditions such as diabetes, which is one of the leading causes of blindness in the United States. However, a failure by the DME industry to make devices accessible has raised serious health concerns by those living with such conditions who are blind and visually impaired. For instance, DME such as glucometers have notoriously been a challenge for diabetics who are blind. This can all change through the development of accessible DME interfaces like smartphone apps and other devices capable of using nanotechnology that can incorporate simple accessibility solutions. Congress can play a role in assuring that such DME technology adheres to the latest software technology standards such as Section 508 of the Rehab Act and that the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) provide assurances that accessible DME devices make their way into the hands of individuals who are blind and visually impaired.

ACB has begun to write draft language for legislation to ensure that all DME is made accessible for people who are blind or visually impaired. The law would push manufacturers to make the devices accessible at the time of purchase, instead of users having to find ways to make them usable. ACB urges the 116th Congress to explore new law to make DME accessible for all Americans.

If you have questions, or need further information on the 2019 ACB imperatives, please contact Claire Stanley, ACB's Advocacy & Outreach Specialist: cstanley@acb.org; (202) 467-5081.

The American Council of the Blind greatly appreciates your support on these critical issues for 2019, and we look forward to working with you during the remainder of the 116th Congress.