



July 17, 2015

The Honorable Chuck Grassley  
United State Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Renee Ellmers  
U.S. House or Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Diana DeGette  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senators Grassley and Schumer, and Representatives Ellmers and DeGette:

On behalf of the Alliance of Wound Care Stakeholders, I am writing in strong support of your bipartisan legislation, *Helping Ensure Life- and Limb-Saving Access to Podiatric Physicians (HELLPP) Act* (HR 1221 / S 626). The Alliance is a nonprofit multidisciplinary trade association of physician medical specialty societies and clinical associations whose mission is to promote quality care and access to products and services for people with wounds, including but not limited to diabetic foot ulcers, through effective advocacy and educational outreach in the regulatory, legislative, and public arenas. A list of our members can be found at [www.woundcarestakeholders.org](http://www.woundcarestakeholders.org).

A diabetic foot ulcer is an open sore or wound that occurs in approximately 15 percent of patients with diabetes and is commonly located on the bottom of the foot. Of those who develop a foot ulcer, 6 percent will be hospitalized due to infection or other ulcer-related complication. Diabetes is the leading cause of non-traumatic lower extremity amputations in the United States, and approximately 14-24 percent of patients with diabetes who develop a foot ulcer will require an amputation. Foot ulcerations precedes 85 percent of diabetes-related amputations.

Since wound care is multidisciplinary, our members work very closely with podiatric physicians, and know first-hand how critical a role they play in diagnosing and treating wounds and ulcers of the foot and ankle. Wound and ulcer care of the foot is unique, and doctors of podiatric medicine (DPMs) are specially trained to effectively heal them and keep them from returning. Particularly for individuals who have diabetes, neuropathy or vascular disease, not properly treating an open wound can put patients at increased risk of developing infection in the skin and bone, and in extreme cases, could lead to limb amputation.

Even though foot and ankle care is a covered benefit under current Medicaid policies, access to medical and surgical foot and ankle care *provided by a podiatrist* is considered an optional benefit and is not

covered by all state plans, thus limiting Medicaid patient access to specialized foot and ankle medical and surgical care.

The HELLPP Act would remedy this access barrier by recognizing podiatrists as physicians in order to ensure that Medicaid patients have timely, equal and full access to the most appropriate and best trained providers of foot and ankle care. The legislation would bring the Medicaid program in line with the Medicare program, which has recognized DPMs as physicians since 1967.

Additionally, the HELLPP Act clarifies documentation requirements for Medicare's Therapeutic Shoe Program for persons with diabetes. This provision would improve coordination of care for beneficiaries with diabetes and result in fewer Medicare office visits. This legislation will be helping to ensure that our nation's vulnerable Medicaid population has access to the important specialized foot and ankle care services provided by podiatrists.

Podiatric services are essential to any comprehensive national health care program. Numerous studies conclude that when podiatric physicians and surgeons are delivering foot and ankle care, patient outcomes are better, hospitalizations are fewer and shorter, and our health system saves billions of dollars annually.

The Alliance of Wound Care Stakeholders thanks you for your leadership on this issue, and looks forward to working with you and the rest of Congress to advance this important legislation. If you have any questions or would like further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marcia Nusgart R.Ph." in a cursive script.

Marcia Nusgart R.Ph.  
Executive Director