

August 9, 2024

Susan Day Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield Pennsylvania 620 Stanwix St Pittsburgh, PA 15222

Re: Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield Pennsylvania's 2024 Payment Cut for Speech-Language Pathology Services

Dear Provider Relations Department:

On behalf of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), I write to respectfully express concern about the recent change in the Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield Pennsylvania (Highmark PA) fee schedule.

ASHA is the national professional, scientific, and credentialing association for 234,000 members, certificate holders, and affiliates who are audiologists; speech-language pathologists (SLPs); speech, language, and hearing scientists; audiology and speech-language pathology assistants; and students.

ASHA members are reporting a cut to their reimbursement rate for speech-language pathology services enacted on July 15, 2024. Reports indicate that this cut is in addition to a reduction that occurred in 2023, bringing rates below those paid in 2022. ASHA is extremely concerned with the reported payment reduction, especially during a time when providers continue to experience high inflation costs. For example, the Medicare Economic Index expects a 4.6% inflation of medical practice costs in 2024 alone.¹ Providers are already experiencing a continued rise in costs to practice.

ASHA is concerned that payment reductions will place an unsustainable financial burden on Highmark PA providers, which could directly impact beneficiaries who need medically necessary speech-language pathology services. This financial strain is particularly acute for small and rural practices, which often operate on thin margins. For many of these providers, the cuts can mean the difference between staying open and shutting their doors. Providers may be forced to make difficult decisions to cut costs, which can lead to longer wait times, reduced staffing levels, and limited access to certain services. One of the most concerning effects of payment cuts is their potential impact on patient care. We ask that you reconsider these payment reductions to help ensure patient access to care.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter. ASHA looks forward to ongoing collaboration to ensure Highmark PA beneficiaries receive appropriate access to medically necessary speech-language pathology services. If you or your staff have any

questions, please contact Meghan Ryan, MSL, ASHA's director of health care policy for private health plans, at mryan@asha.org.

Sincerely,

Tena L. McNamara, AuD, CCC-A/SLP 2024 ASHA President

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¹ The Boards of Trustees, Federal Hospital Insurance and Federal Supplementary Medical Insurance Trust Funds. (2024, May 6). 2024 Annual Report of the Boards of Trustees of the Federal Hospital Insurance and Federal Supplementary Medical Insurance Trust Funds. https://www.cms.gov/oact/tr/2024