

Background

On November 12, 2019, Novitas Solutions, Inc. – a Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Medicare Administrative Contractor (MAC) – announced a massive reimbursement reduction for portable x-ray transportation services in 11 states (Arkansas, Colorado, Delaware, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, and Texas) and the District of Columbia. The rate reimbursement reduction would set a uniform reimbursement amount (\$113.19) for portable x-ray transportation services in these diverse geographical states.

NASL's member companies that supply portable x-ray services work to ensure that vulnerable Medicare beneficiaries – including those who live in skilled nursing facilities (SNFs), the homebound, or reside in long-term care facilities – have access to critical x-ray services. Portable x-ray services are essential urgent care services that ensure there are no delays in patient care. Absent portable x-ray services, beneficiaries will have to be transported to the emergency room or other care setting by ambulance typically at five times the cost of portable x-ray transportation, rather than receive rapid x-ray services where they reside. Access to portable x-ray services also eliminates serious clinical risks related to transporting vulnerable patients to the hospital or other location for an x-ray and enables care providers to monitor the effectiveness of treatments.

Initially, these cuts were supposed to take effect January 1, 2020. Following a coordinated advocacy effort from NASL and the American Portable Diagnostics Association (APDA), Novitas delayed implementation until April 1, 2020, while additional data is collected and evaluated.

Impact of the Reimbursement Reductions

The drastic payment reductions (between a 15% and 56% reduction) will severely limit portable x-ray suppliers' ability to maintain service at the current levels. The current care model is designed to cover portable x-ray services 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with services delivered within hours of ordering. The portable x-ray suppliers across the impacted states and the District of Columbia will have no choice but to restrict geographic service areas and limit service hours, directly changing how portable x-ray services are delivered to Medicare beneficiaries.

These reimbursement reductions will compound the unfortunate reality that over the last decade, reimbursement has not kept up with inflation or national indicators of transportation costs. Annual updates have been below the ambulance inflation factor, Medicare economic index, CPI-U, and gasoline prices.

Ask Congress

To maintain the current Novitas rates for portable x-ray transportation services until enough information/data can be collected to demonstrate the total cost of providing these services.

Key Facts

Novitas Solutions, Inc. has set a uniform portable x-ray transportation rate (\$113.19) across 11 states (AR, CO, DE, LA, MD, MS, NJ, NM, OK, PA, TX) and DC ranging from 15% to 56%, effective April 1, 2020.

Access to care for Medicare beneficiaries will be dramatically decreased if these reduced rates take effect on January 1, 2020.

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If this reimbursement reduction goes into effect, it will result in adverse patient outcomes in the form of:

- Reduced or completely eliminated portable x-ray services;
- Delays in diagnosing and treating beneficiary conditions; and
- Higher overall health care costs resulting from increased use of ambulance services and unnecessary hospital visits and admissions.

These negative patient outcomes will also adversely impact nursing homes and long-term care settings due to increased hospital/emergency department visits and admissions, which may result in nursing homes' negative performance on CMS' quality measures.

Supporting Healthcare Costs and Reducing Unnecessary Hospitalizations

MedPAC has also supported access to portable x-ray services in nursing facilities. In its June 2017 Report to Congress, it found:

- Facilities with access to on-site x-ray services had lower rates of potentially avoidable hospital admissions compared with facilities without access to these services.
- "The availability of on-site x-ray services was associated with lower rates of ED visits or observation stays."

Novitas Solutions' Rate Reductions Effective April 1, 2020:

State	2019	2020	Decrease	Percentage Decrease
Arkansas	\$189.95	\$113.19	(\$76.76)	-40%
Colorado	\$256.09	\$113.19	(\$142.90)	-56%
Delaware	\$217.35	\$113.19	(\$104.16)	-48%
Louisiana	\$178.45	\$113.19	(\$65.26)	-37%
Maryland	\$220.72	\$113.19	(\$107.53)	-49%
Mississippi	\$133.93	\$113.19	(\$20.74)	-15%
New Jersey	\$151.98	\$113.19	(\$38.79)	-26%
New Mexico	\$252.22	\$113.19	(\$139.03)	-55%
Oklahoma	\$252.22	\$113.19	(\$139.03)	-55%
Pennsylvania	\$168.26	\$113.19	(\$55.07)	-33%
Texas	\$257.35	\$113.19	(\$144.16)	-56%
Washington, DC	\$217.35	\$113.19	(\$104.16)	-48%

NASL Asks Congress

Maintain the current Novitas rates for portable x-ray transportation services until enough information/data can be collected to demonstrate the total cost of providing these services.