

The Honorable David G. Valadao (CA22)

E&C Member Day Remarks

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I appreciate the opportunity to be here today to discuss the Supplemental Oxygen Access Reform Act, or the SOAR Act, which I reintroduced this Congress.

The SOAR Act eliminates barriers that over 1.5 million Medicare beneficiaries with chronic conditions face—including many of my constituents in the Central Valley—when trying to access lifesaving supplemental oxygen.

This legislation makes critical reforms to ensure that patients, especially those living in rural and underserved communities, can receive reliable and lifesaving oxygen support.

Since 2011, CMS has implemented a competitive bidding process for supplemental oxygen, causing payment rates for all types of oxygen to drop substantially.

While the competitive bidding program has generated payment reductions and Medicare savings, these reductions too often come at the expense of access to essential oxygen equipment and respiratory care services.

Given the inadequate reimbursement rates, many individuals who require supplemental oxygen do not receive the level or type of treatment their condition needs.

Medicare also does not currently reimburse for the services of respiratory therapists, which are often vital, especially when a patient is given a new oxygen prescription.

If patients are unable to access equipment and respiratory support, their risk of emergency room visits increases, and their chronic condition may worsen.

I was encouraged by CMS's announcement last month that supplemental oxygen will not be included in the next round of the competitive bidding program. Locking in past savings is a meaningful first step—but more must be done.

That's why it's critical Congress works to ensure long-term stability in the program, which the SOAR Act provides.

The SOAR Act is comprehensive legislation that removes all oxygen and oxygen equipment, including stationary and portable devices, from Medicare competitive bidding.

It also gives CMS the authority to create a new payment rate for liquid oxygen to help address the loss of access to this modality nationwide.

The legislation further strengthens program integrity by enhancing fraud and abuse protections, ensures that respiratory therapist services are reimbursed when medically required, and implements additional patient protections.

I look forward to working with the Chairman to advance the SOAR Act and to secure its inclusion in the next Medicare package.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.