

Maine State Legislature
Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs
2/12/2025

RE: LD 210 - An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2025, June 30, 2026, and June 30, 2027.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of LD 210 and for Health and Human Services and their commitment they continue to provide for the DME industry here in Maine.

Bedard supports maintaining MaineCare funding, as proposed, to hold their rate alignment with Medicare for Medicare covered DME but does request annual CPI adjustments for non-Medicare DME to be included in the funds for Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2025, June 30, 2026, and June 30, 2027. Not including those CPI adjustments increases the chance that DME's may have to reduce or eliminate the items offered if they become unprofitable due to inflationary pressures.

Your support as legislators is a key component of our team's ability to help those in our community and beyond. As part of our commitment to ensuring everyone's healthcare journey is as stress free as possible, we feel it is important to provide you with background information about the DME industry and how local businesses such as Bedard support our patients.

The Importance of the DME Industry: Ensuring Health and Accessibility

The Durable Medical Equipment (DME) industry plays a pivotal role in the healthcare system by providing essential medical devices and supplies that enable individuals with disabilities, chronic conditions, and acute medical needs to live more independently and improve their quality of life. This industry encompasses a wide range of needs, from wheelchairs and hospital beds to insulin pumps and incontinence supplies. The significance of the DME industry can be understood through several key aspects: its impact on patient care, economic contributions, and cost savings for Maine's healthcare system.

Enhancing Patient Care

One of the primary benefits of the DME industry is its direct positive impact on patient care. Durable medical equipment allows individuals to manage their health conditions more effectively at home, reducing the need for prolonged hospital stays and frequent medical visits. This not only improves the patient's comfort and convenience but also alleviates the burden on healthcare facilities. For example, home oxygen therapy devices enable patients with respiratory conditions to receive continuous oxygen supply, thereby enhancing their respiratory function and overall well-being without the need for hospitalization.

Independence and Quality of Life

DME empowers individuals with disabilities and mobility issues to lead more independent lives. Wheelchairs, mobility scooters, and stair lifts provide the necessary support for individuals to move around their homes and communities with greater ease. This independence is crucial for maintaining mental and emotional health, as it promotes social interaction and engagement in daily activities. By facilitating mobility and accessibility, DME helps to reduce the feelings of isolation and dependence that many individuals with disabilities experience.

Support for Chronic Conditions

For individuals with chronic conditions such as diabetes, arthritis, and cardiovascular diseases, DME offers essential tools for ongoing disease management. For instance, blood glucose monitors, insulin pumps, and continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) machines are critical for managing diabetes and sleep apnea, respectively. These devices help patients monitor their conditions in real-time, enabling timely interventions and adjustments in treatment plans. As a result, patients can better control their health outcomes and prevent complications that may arise from unmanaged conditions.

Economic Contributions

The DME industry is also a significant contributor to the economy, providing employment opportunities and supporting related industries. Manufacturers, suppliers, and distributors of durable medical equipment generate jobs across various sectors, including design, production, sales, and maintenance. Additionally, the industry's growth fosters innovation and competition, driving advancements in medical technology and improving the overall standard of care.

Cost Savings for Healthcare Systems

By enabling home-based care and reducing the need for hospital admissions, the DME industry helps to lower healthcare costs. This is particularly important in an era where healthcare expenditures are rising globally. The use of DME allows for more efficient allocation of healthcare resources, ensuring that hospital beds and medical staff are available for patients with acute and emergency needs. Consequently, both public and private healthcare systems can achieve cost savings while still providing high-quality care to their populations.

Medicare and Medicaid Reimbursement

In the United States, Medicare and Medicaid play a crucial role in supporting the DME industry by providing reimbursement for approved medical equipment. This reimbursement framework ensures that patients have access to necessary devices without facing prohibitive out-of-pocket costs.

In 2023 the Maine Department of Health and Human Services adopted rules aligning MaineCare's DME rates with Medicare rates, including rental classifications and rates, ensuring compliance with P.L. 2021, ch. 398. It also adhered to P.L. 2021, ch. 639, by incorporating annual inflation adjustments based on the CPI for non-Medicare DME.

Those updates to align MaineCare's DME rates with Medicare rates, including rental classifications and rates, demonstrated the commitment to maintaining affordability and compliance with federal guidelines. Additionally, incorporating annual inflation adjustments based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for non-Medicare DME ensures that reimbursement rates remain fair and reflective of current economic conditions.

Personalized Care

Modern DME products are increasingly designed to provide personalized care tailored to the specific needs of individual patients. For example, adjustable hospital beds with customizable settings allow patients to find the most comfortable and supportive positions, thereby improving their rest and recovery. Similarly, adaptive devices such as prosthetics and orthotics are now more precisely fitted to the user, offering greater comfort and functionality. This trend towards personalization is helping to ensure that patients receive the best possible care and support from their medical equipment.

Reimbursement and Accessibility

While Medicare and Medicaid provide important support for DME reimbursement, there are still gaps in coverage that can limit patient access to necessary equipment. Advocacy for expanded reimbursement policies and increased funding for DME programs is crucial for ensuring that all patients can benefit from these essential devices. Additionally, efforts to raise awareness about the availability and importance of DME can help to improve accessibility and utilization.

Conclusion

The DME industry is an indispensable component of the healthcare system, offering vital support to individuals with diverse medical needs. By enhancing patient care, contributing to the economy, and advancing medical technology, the industry plays a crucial role in improving health outcomes and quality of life. Addressing the challenges and seizing the opportunities within the DME sector will be essential for ensuring its continued success and impact on healthcare in Maine.

Respectfully,

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About Bedard:

Since 1898, Bedard Pharmacy & Medical Supplies has been providing old-fashioned customer service while remaining at the forefront of advancements in pharmacy and medical supplies. As a local, family-owned business, we serve the health needs of Maine residents from our headquarters in Auburn, as well as ship supplies all over the country. We offer convenient services that include medication delivery, and a range of home medical equipment and supplies to help improve your life. Bedard is also a leader in providing pharmacy services to long-term care facilities.