

Keystater

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Message From the President – Erin Buckwalter



Welcome to spring! It's hard to believe how quickly my PSHA presidency is coming to an end. I've thoroughly enjoyed my presidency and remain honored

to serve the PSHA Board and its members. I want to thank all of you for your ongoing support of PSHA. I always say, "It takes a village" to achieve successful advocacy. PSHA and its executive board appreciate your feedback and membership.

I'd like to take this opportunity to provide a few updates. I will keep my updates brief, as the vice president for publications packed this newsletter with many of PSHA's efforts.

- First, we had a Hill Day in Harrisburg on October 22, 2024. It was a wonderful opportunity to raise awareness about our professions and build relationships with legislators. Current and past board members, committee chairs and committee members attended the event. We distributed information sheets, engaged with legislators and held a press conference. In meetings with legislators and the legislators' staff, we had the opportunity to advocate for areas such as low Medicaid reimbursement rates. We received valuable feedback on next steps from the legislators and their staff. The day was so successful that we have planned another Hill Day for June 25, 2025.
- Next, PSHA's Annual Convention took place in March in Pittsburgh. PSHA hosted a Convention that inspired change and advanced knowledge in our professions. There was a fantastic slate of

speakers, along with multiple student-specific sessions. I'd like to give a special thanks to Mary Weidner, the vice president for convention planning and program, the Convention Committee and the Craven Management staff, particularly Amy Caye, for all their time and effort. Watch our social media outlets and website for information on our 2026 Convention. The Convention will return to the eastern side of the state in 2026 at the Kalahari Resort in the Poconos, March 26-28!

- Our advocacy work remains steadfast and fruitful. I want to thank our vice president for governmental relations, our lobbyist, the board and all the committees for their relentless advocacy for PSHA. You can find more details on our legislative endeavors later in this newsletter.

As always, we continue to look to our members to contribute to PSHA efforts. PSHA appreciates all actions that support our continued mission and vision. This edition of the *Keystater* will offer information on some of our committees. If you're interested in volunteering for one of our committees (Schools, Government Relations, Telehealth/Healthcare, Private Practice, Early Intervention, Higher Education and DEIA), please visit our social media sites or website for more information. Finally, PSHA's website offers further information on financial donations, current updates and information on renewing your membership.

Before closing, I would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to our outgoing board members, Reethee Antony, Abbey Antolic,

Teresa Pudvah and Mary Jane Granito. I am grateful for your time and knowledge and wish you all the best. I would also like to thank our past president, Dana Bitetti, as she closes out her three-year presidential tenure. Her contributions to PSHA have been and continue to be significant in advocacy, communication and leadership. I'd also like to welcome our upcoming president, Nicole Billak, aboard. She had a busy year as president-elect. You will hear more about her recent advocacy efforts later in this newsletter. No doubt, PSHA is in great hands with Nicole as the president. My presidency would not have gone as well as it did without the support and knowledge of both Dana and Nicole.

In closing, I would like to thank our lobbyist McNeesGR, our association management office Craven Management Associates, the PSHA Executive Board and our committees for their commitment to PSHA. My presidency was smooth and enjoyable due to your consistent communication and efforts. Many thanks for a successful presidency. I couldn't have done it without all of you. And finally, once again, I extend my thanks to our members unwavering support of our organization. As I said in the Fall edition of the *Keystater*, through our collective efforts, we can promote advocacy, advance knowledge and inspire change, resulting in the continued success of the speech-language pathology and audiology professions.

Erin Buckwalter

Erin Buckwalter, MS, CCC-SLP
President

Newly Elected PSHA Board Members

Congratulations to the following newly elected/re-elected PSHA Executive Board Members. Terms begin on July 1.

President-Elect: Craig Coleman, MA, CCC-SLP, BCS-F

Vice President for Publications: Monica Kaniamattam, PhD, CCC-SLP

Vice President for Public Information and Professional Communication: Dana Bitetti, PhD, CCC-SLP

Co-Vice Presidents for Convention Program and Planning: Mary Weidner, PhD, CCC-SLP, and Amanda Mahoney, PhD, CCC-SLP

Vice President for Professional Preparation and Continuing Education: Katelyn Dwyer, SLPD/L, CCC-SLP

Vice President for Professional Practices - Speech-Language Pathology: Akila Rajappa, PhD, CCC-SLP, BCS-S

Secretary: Staci Sorrell, MA, CCC-SLP

Student Representative: Jenna Nurick

Alternate Student Representative: Ashley Dugas

PSHA Committees

Being a PSHA member is a huge first step for Pennsylvania speech-language pathologists who want to become more involved in advocacy and supporting state-led efforts to protect and encourage the growth of our profession. Did you know that you can focus your efforts even more by becoming a member of one of the many PSHA committees? PSHA has a variety of committees that may be of interest to SLP students and clinicians alike, and through membership, committees can successfully partake in focused initiatives that matter most to SLPs throughout our state.

When I joined PSHA just a couple of years ago, I immediately was drawn to the Healthcare and Telepractice Committee. I had spent my entire almost 20-year long career working in acute care hospitals, and I knew that healthcare-related issues were a topic that needed attention within our state. From participating in discussions with our state representatives in Harrisburg to providing educational grand rounds for students and professionals, this committee has been a wonderful contributor to the overall mission of PSHA. There is even a Private Practice subcommittee that tackles issues that those working in this sector are facing.

While healthcare and/or private practice may not be your areas of interest, it is likely that you can find a committee that is the right fit for you. Below is a list of committees:

- Schools Committee
- Government Affairs Committee
- Convention Committee
- Audiology Committee
- Early Intervention Committee (newly formed)
- DEIA Committee
- Higher Education Committee (newly formed)
- Healthcare and Telepractice Committee
 - o Private Practice Subcommittee

If you have questions or would like to learn more about any of the committees, you can email me at vpprofessionalpracticeslp@psha.org. I would be happy to discuss the different committees and their goals/initiatives with anyone who is interested in becoming more involved.

Teresa Pudvah

Teresa Pudvah, MA, CCC-SLP
VP for Professional Practices - Speech-Language Pathology

SUBMISSIONS

Submissions of articles, manuscripts, reports and letters to the editor are encouraged. The *Keystater* also welcomes suggestions of editorial coverage. The editorial staff reserves the right to edit submissions for length and clarity.

The statements and opinions contained in the articles of the *Keystater* are solely those of the individual authors and contributors and not of the Pennsylvania Speech-Language-Hearing Association. The appearance of advertisements in the newsletter is not a warranty, endorsement or approval of the products or of their safety. PSHA disclaims responsibility for any injury to persons or property resulting from any ideas or products referred to in the articles or advertisements.

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Advertising

The *Keystater* solicits and welcomes advertisements. Acceptance of advertising does not imply product endorsement by the PSHA Executive Board. Rates and submission deadlines are available upon request from Amy Caye, PSHA Account Manager, 700 McKnight Park Drive, Suite 708, Pittsburgh, PA 15237, 412-366-9858.

www.psha.org

Keep Your Information Up-To-Date!

Log on to the Member Center at www.psha.org, enter your Last Name and your Member Number.

You can then edit your account information, renew your membership, register for an event, search for a member and read the *Keystater*.

Government Relations Updates

Thank you, as always, to our board and committee members for providing your input and feedback on proposed legislation. Your participation is the key in our ability to help inform legislators about the impact of bills on our professions and the individuals we serve.

THANK YOU to McNeasGR for your continued assistance and expertise!

BIG NEWS: Hill Day, Part 2! PSHA is hosting a second Hill Day event, to help educate our legislators about our role, the needs of the people we serve and barriers to accessing care. The event will be in the Capitol on June 25, and will feature educational displays in the Capitol Main Rotunda, visits with legislators and staff members, and a press conference to highlight PSHA's priorities.

MORE BIG NEWS: PSHA has created a Caregiver and Client Advisory Panel to provide feedback about bills and other PSHA initiatives. If you know anyone who would like to participate, please reach out!

ADVOCACY ASK: If you have not done so, please call your State Representative (find my rep - <https://live.cicerodata.com/live/state>) and ask them to cosponsor the Interstate Compact Bill (HB 80 - <https://www.palegis.us/legislation/bills/2025/hb80>). You can learn more about the Interstate Compact and read a terrific issue brief created by ASHA for us right at https://drive.google.com/file/d/1AY_GZs6tAaAvhQgKy022DSNXiUqJzW22/view.

HARRISBURG HIGHLIGHTS:

The legislature returned to session the first week of May to a flurry of activity. Committees in the House considered bills on a wide range of topics including transit funding, recreational marijuana legalization and election reforms. Committees in the state Senate held hearings on utility ratepayer issues, law enforcement recruitment and retention and banning TikTok on state-issued devices. The House and Senate are both in session the first two weeks of May, then recess for the remainder of the month before returning to Harrisburg in June to work in earnest on passing the general fund budget and its associated bills.

RECENT LEGISLATION OF INTEREST AND ADVOCACY ACTIONS:

SB 318: "Ensuring Coverage for Post-Acute Neuro-Rehabilitation" would require insurance coverage for rehab following traumatic brain injury. PSHA supported this bill!

HB 949: "Insurance Coverage for Childhood Apraxia of Speech" would require insurance coverage for apraxia. We also support this bill.

SR 8: "Establishing an Advisory Commission to Develop a Comprehensive Plan for Public Education" would create an advisory group to develop a comprehensive plan to improve public education. PSHA has requested representation from school-based speech-language pathologists in this plan.

HB 80: "Authorizing Pennsylvania to Join the Audiology & Speech-Language Pathology Interstate Compact." PSHA sent a letter of strong support for this bill that would simplify interstate practice.

S.B. 139: "Roman's Law - Delayed School Enrollment for Children with Autism, Developmental Delays or Intellectual Disabilities." This bill would allow extended participation in early intervention. PSHA wrote a letter expressing concern about the impact of this legislation on early intervention.

HB 74: "Voluntary Autism Screening" would require the state to provide autism screening tools to child care providers for voluntary use with caregivers and children. PSHA made suggestions regarding the language in the bill and offered our assistance in selecting a tool.

HB 517, "Protections for Drivers with Autism" would enhance the safety of autistic drivers by including a voluntary designation on driver's licenses. PSHA sent a letter supporting this bill.

HB 240 "Hearing Aid Test for School Bus Drivers" would eliminate the current requirement of an electroacoustic analysis test in addition to a standard hearing test while wearing a hearing aid. PSHA sent a letter supporting this bill. HB 240 passed the House unanimously and awaits action in the Senate Transportation Committee.

HB 544: "The Health Care Practitioner Credentialing Act" would streamline our credentialing process. PSHA sent a letter supporting this bill.

SB 51: "Protecting the Essential Health Benefits for Insurance Policies Sold in Pennsylvania" would ensure coverage or rehabilitative services in insurance policies sold in Pennsylvania. PSHA sent a letter supporting this bill.

HB 826: "Redrafted Bill: Michael's Law —Admission Fairness for Persons with Care Attendants in the PA Human Relations Commission Act" would prevent individuals requiring personal care assistants from paying double admission to events and institutions. PSHA sent a letter supporting this bill.

About the Governmental Relations Committee

The Governmental Relations Committee focuses on identifying and prioritizing legislation that may influence the practice acts provided by the members of the association. In addition, this committee will inform members of legislative advocacy efforts. The committee supports the vice president for governmental relations by providing feedback on current legislative interests.

Finally, the committee focuses on educating its members and students on advocacy. This committee meets monthly. The committee is always seeking new members with a zest for advocacy.

If you have questions, ideas or just want to be involved, let us know!

Email us at PSHA@pspa.org or president@pspa.org, or complete our Advocacy Inquiry Form at <https://pspa.org/pspa-advocacy-inquiry/>

Tamara Sepe

Tamara Sepe, MS, CCC-SLP
Vice President for Governmental Relations

Erin Buckwalter

Erin Buckwalter, MS, CCC-SLP
Vice President for Governmental Relations

Angie J.M. Armbrust

Angie J.M. Armbrust, MPA
Senior Associate, McNeas-Winter Group, LLC

2025 PSHA Convention Wrap-Up and Plans for 2026

RIPPLE EFFECT

ADVANCING KNOWLEDGE
INSPIRING CHANGE

PSHA | 2025

Thank you to everyone who made the 2025 Convention a success! It would not have been possible without everyone that attended, the Convention Planning Committee, PSHA Office and speakers. I learned so much, and I hope you did, too.

Let's talk 2026! We are thrilled to be going to Kalahari Resort in the Poconos March 26-28, 2026! This is a new venue for PSHA, and it is sure to be a fun time. All rooms come with passes to the attached waterpark, so we hope you can make it into a fun trip with family and friends!

I am grateful to be serving another term on the PSHA Executive Board,

this time as co-vice president for convention planning and program with my partner-in-crime, Mandy Mahoney. We will begin brainstorming in the upcoming weeks. Have a great idea for topics or speakers? Please share!

If you are interested in serving on the 2026 Convention Planning Committee, please reach out! mweidner@pennwest.edu.

We look forward to seeing you in the Poconos!

Mary Weidner

Mary Weidner, PhD, CCC-SLP
Vice President for Convention Planning and Program

Thank you to the following 2025 PSHA Convention sponsors:

- Student Reception: **Salus at Drexel University**
- Session Sponsor: **Northeastern Speech-Language-Hearing Association of Pennsylvania (NESHAP)**



2026 PSHA Convention Presenters and Exhibitors

Look for information on the 2026 PSHA Convention Call for Paper submission opportunities and the Exhibitor Prospectus for potential exhibitor and sponsorship/marketing opportunities in the coming months.

Visit www.psha.org

Questions about PSHA 2026? Contact the PSHA Office at 412-366-9858 or email psha@psha.org.



Salus at Drexel University

SPEAK UP

CONTINUE YOUR COMMUNICATION
SCIENCES & DISORDERS EDUCATION

salus.edu/SLP
salus.edu/AUD

PSHA 2025 Honors and Awards

2025 Appreciation of Service Awards

2025 Convention Committee members.

2025 PSHA Life Members

Congratulations to the following PSHA members who have attained the age of 65 and have been a member for more than 15 consecutive years:

Elizabeth Frantz	Barbara Kalla
Ann Millett	Eileen Puglia
Nancy Travers	

NSSLHA Chapter Honors

West Chester University Chapter

Outgoing Board Members

Thank you to the following members of the PSHA Executive Board who will be leaving the board this year:

Reethee Antony	Abby Antolic
Mary Jane Granito	Teresa Pudvah

Meritorious Posters

Congratulations to the following Meritorious Poster recipients:

AI in Clinical Practice: Student Experiences and Case Studies – Misericordia University

Evaluating the Use of the Goldman-Fristoe Test of Articulation for Monolingual Chicano English Speaking Preschoolers – University of Pittsburgh

How do Toddlers on the Autism Spectrum Explore and Use Objects During Toy Play in the Home Environment? – Duquesne University

The Effects of Coaching Caregivers in the Adaptation and Use of Adapted Toys on Communication and Parent Satisfaction for Children With Complex Communication Needs – Lebanon Valley College

Virtual Reality in Speech Therapy: Transforming Treatment Through Immersive Technology – Misericordia University

Celebrating Excellence: Michelle Catão Awarded the 2025 Von Drach Memorial Scholarship

Each year, the Pennsylvania Speech-Language-Hearing Association (PSHA) honors the memory of Dr. Robert Von Drach—an esteemed leader, educator, and advocate in our profession—through the presentation of the Von Drach Memorial Scholarship. This prestigious award, established to recognize Dr. Von Drach's remarkable dedication and years of service, is given to a student who demonstrates academic excellence, leadership, professional engagement and a clear commitment to advancing the fields of speech-language pathology.

This year, after a competitive selection process involving outstanding candidates from across the Commonwealth, the 2025 Von Drach Memorial Scholarship has been awarded to Michelle Catao, a graduate student in Speech-Language Pathology at Duquesne University.

Michelle stood out for her impressive academic record, her growing body of research and her extensive professional involvement. At Duquesne, she has played a pivotal role in several research initiatives, earning co-authorship on published articles and presenting her work at both state and national conferences. Her research interests have led her to take on the rigorous challenge of a Master's thesis focusing on mastication—a project that underscores her intellectual curiosity and commitment to evidence-based practice.

Beyond the lab, Michelle is a visible leader in her academic and professional communities. She currently serves as the NSSLHA research chair at Duquesne and is actively involved in her university's American Sign Language club. Her work in these roles reflects a strong passion for supporting underserved and minority populations and a broader dedication to advocacy within the field.

Her scholarship application, including glowing letters of recommendation, made it clear that Michelle embodies the qualities that the Von Drach Memorial Scholarship seeks to honor: a commitment to service, academic excellence, leadership and an enduring passion for the profession.

“Michelle's dedication to research, professional engagement and advocacy mirrors the values that Dr. Von Drach held so dear,” said a PSHA representative during the award presentation at the 2025 PSHA President's Reception. “We are confident that she will continue to make meaningful contributions to our field and to the clients she serves.”

The PSHA community congratulates Michelle Catao on this well-deserved recognition. Her achievements exemplify the spirit of the Von Drach Memorial Scholarship, and her journey serves as an inspiration to students and professionals alike.

Visit www.psha.org to read descriptions of all of the awards. Know someone who deserves to be honored? Nominate someone for next year's awards by February 15, 2026.

Follow PSHA on Social Media

Stay up-to-date with the latest PSHA updates by following us on our social media platforms.



Update on Advocacy for Reimbursement

Medicaid Update:

The Tri-Alliance Medicaid Task Force (ST, PT-OT) meets every other week with state and national representatives. The Tri-Alliance is committed to working with policymakers to ensure equitable access to therapy services for all Pennsylvanians.

Our task force members met with the Office of Medical Assistance Programs (OMAP) on April 7, 2025, to present data demonstrating the urgent challenges faced by speech-language pathologists/assistants (SLPs/SLPAs), occupational therapists/practitioners (OTs/COTAs) and physical therapists/practitioners (PTs/PTAs) serving Pennsylvanians with Medicaid. We were able to present our issues to representatives, including Secretary Val Arkoosh from the Department of Human Services, Deputy Secretary Kristin Ahrens from the Office of Developmental Programs, Deputy Secretary Sally Kozak from the Office of Medical Assistance Programs, and Secretary Uri Monson from the Office of the Budget. Urgent challenges discussed include worsening access to care. Medicaid reimbursement rates for therapy services have remained stagnant or declined for over a decade, despite increasing operational costs. Medicaid reimbursement for therapists ranks among the lowest in the country. Clinic sustainability is at risk. Therapists within the Commonwealth report difficulty keeping up with overhead costs, challenges in hiring and retaining staff, and increasing waitlists as more practices opt out of Medicaid. Therapy providers outside the Commonwealth are hesitant to expand their presence in PA due to the lower Medicaid Fee Schedule, which could affect therapy access when Compact legislation permits licensure portability within the Commonwealth. Data from multidisciplinary practices shows monthly financial deficits. Providers will serve Medicaid patients if rates improve. Ninety-five percent of surveyed speech-language pathologists and 93% of surveyed physical therapy employers indicated willingness to

accept Medicaid if reimbursement rates and administrative burdens are addressed. Action is critical because Pennsylvania's Medicaid therapy reimbursement rates are substantially lower than neighboring states, creating "therapy deserts" where patients must travel long distances or wait months for services. Access to timely, effective therapy becomes even more vital to equitable and quality care. Budget cuts or inaction to review current outdated rates will only increase long-term downstream healthcare costs as untreated conditions lead to further potential complications, hospitalizations, and greater dependency on the healthcare program to sustain aging in place within the least-restrictive environment. Early detection and therapy for dysphagia (difficulty swallowing) significantly reduce healthcare costs. The Pennsylvania Autism Insurance Act (Act 62) is an insurance mandate that outlines distinct CPT codes that should be covered by both private and Medicaid/CHIP plans for people with autism. Currently some of the most critical CPT codes utilized when providing therapy services to people with autism are not included on the Medicaid outpatient fee schedule, giving MCOs the opportunity to decline paying for those services. It is imperative that legislators know how this is affecting their communities, as Act 62 non-compliance for this population exists. If providers were to submit complaints to the PA Insurance Commission, no action can be taken as the Commission views this situation as a contract dispute, not a payment issue. Therefore, the Tri-Alliance is relying on legislators to assist with this initiative.

We urge representatives to support legislation and budget efforts to: Raise Medicaid therapy service rates to competitive levels. Reduce administrative barriers to provider participation. Protect access for 3.1 million Pennsylvanians covered by Medicaid and CHIP.

Check out the PSHA *InBrief* for July 2025 for a comprehensive table on Speech Therapy

Medicaid Reimbursement Rates along with Inflationary Trends Across PA and our neighboring States.

Our next step is to send a letter completed on May 14, 2025, to representatives (excerpts included in this PSHA article) to recap the meeting and continue advocacy. Thanks to Nicole Billak, PSHA President Elect, for her leadership in crafting this letter and collaborating with members of the Tri-Alliance! Stay tuned for social media posts to help with advocacy!!! **SAVE THE DATE for HILL DAY June 25, 2025!**

Private Insurance Update:

The Tri-Alliance Highmark Task Force (ST, PT-OT) meets biweekly with state and national representatives. PSHA met with Highmark representatives on April 1, 2025. Attendees from Highmark included Jeremy Stuck (Highmark Home and Community Services LLC), Christopher J. Marrone (Highmark Home and Community Services LLC), Leslie Fisher (Highmark Home and Community Services LLC), Peter A. Heckroth (Highmark Home and Community Services LLC), and Anita Kozel-Bise (Highmark Home and Community Services LLC and an SLP). Thanks to Rebecca Bowen, MA, CCC-SLP, PNAP, CAE, Director of Health Care Policy, Value & Innovation (ASHA), for her advice on terminology and meeting preparation. Our meeting objectives included creating a collaborative forum between Highmark and PSHA to discuss barriers to access to care, sharing results from our Prior Authorization Survey and its impact on small therapy clinics, and collaboratively problem-solving ways to increase early access to speech therapy.

Results of PSHA's Prior Authorization Data Survey:

Presentation of findings from the prior authorization data survey included (36 responses, 80.6% from small private practices) (populations served include 55.6% pediatric, 11.1% adults, 33.3% both pediatric and adults) (Facility locations throughout the state were represented 72.2% suburban, 13.9%

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rural, 13.9% urban) Insights on current trends and challenges faced in the prior authorization process for speech therapy include (Initial prior authorization for approval or denial take 30.6% one week, 30.6% one to two weeks) (Extensions 52.8% one to two weeks, 27.8% less than a week) (This takes time and adds administrative cost and burden.

Financial Impact of Speech Therapy and Cost Savings

Research Findings included Speech Therapy for the Elderly: Research on the financial savings of early intervention in elderly patients (e.g., reducing hospital readmissions, preventing long-term care, and improving functional outcomes in conditions like stroke or

dementia) was shared. Discussion of how reduced reimbursement rates impact quality of care for this population was highlighted.

Speech Therapy for Children:

Discussion on the importance of early speech intervention for children, including reduced special education costs and improved academic outcomes occurred. Long-term cost savings by improving early language development and preventing future speech and learning disabilities was illustrated.

The Administrative Burden of Prior Authorizations impacts patient care, delays accessing timely treatment and results in negative patient outcomes due to delayed or denied services.

PSHA sent a letter to Anita Kozel-Bise (SLP who works for Highmark) to request preauthorization training for PSHA members. Our Private Practice Subcommittee announced that Anita Kozel-Bise, who works for Highmark in the Helion/Auth department, offered to guide our SLPs through the Authorization submission process. We look forward to Anita assisting us with the onerous task of submitting authorizations and hope to foster this relationship with Highmark representatives.

Theresa Jacopetti

Theresa Jacopetti, MS, CCC-SLP
STAR Representative

ASHA SEAL Updates



The past three months have been a time of significant collaboration, advocacy and reflection across the SEALs network. From federal developments impacting education policy to state-level legislative wins and challenges in AAC access, SEALs members have continued to work toward solutions that strengthen services for students and support for school-based professionals. Below is a summary of the key highlights from the March, April and May 2025 SEALs calls.

March 2025 SEALs Call Summary

The March SEALs conference call welcomed Julia Lidgard of Utah to the team and featured critical federal updates from Eric Masten and Bill Knudsen at ASHA. They

shared growing concerns about the impact of drastic staffing reductions at the U.S. Department of Education—down from 4,100 to 2,100 employees. These changes raise serious questions about the Department's ability to meet statutory requirements and the potential for reduced services at the state level. Additionally, participants discussed the implications of recent Executive Orders (EOs) that redefine "biological" classifications and impose restrictions on Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) eligibility for certain organizations. State leaders provided updates on advocacy efforts and legislative priorities, with many focused on salary supplements, SLPA licensure rules and growing service shortages. Action alerts and resource links were shared, and participants emphasized the importance of gathering local data to support national advocacy.

April 2025 SEALs Call Summary

During the April SEALs call, participants focused on collaborative efforts to strengthen service delivery in schools

and improve support for AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication). New SEALs were welcomed by Eileen Crowe of ASHA, and updates were shared about ASHA's "100 Voices, One Future" centennial campaign and Boot Camp for school-based workload solutions. A special roundtable discussion hosted by SIG 12 explored common challenges in AAC implementation. Attendees cited staff confidence and classroom consistency as major obstacles, and discussed tools like the PRC Literacy Planner, SETT framework, and lending libraries to bridge the gap. Medicaid billing challenges were also raised, with reimbursement often being redirected away from those who bill. Finally, Stacey Glasgow from ASHA encouraged SEALs to share information about "grow your own" programs connecting school districts and universities to build the SLP workforce. The session closed with plans to reconvene on May 12 to share state action items.

May 2025 SEALs Call Summary

The May SEALs call provided an open forum for states to share key

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updates and legislative progress. With 25 participants in attendance, the discussion ranged from AAC device denial trends to lobbyist effectiveness and stipend advocacy. Several states—including Arkansas and Utah—noted increases in AAC denials, particularly through Medicaid, sparking a conversation about shared challenges and funding barriers. States also reflected on the value of retaining lobbyists, with Indiana, Wisconsin, Kentucky and others sharing recent legislative wins tied to lobbyist support. Multiple states, including Illinois and Virginia, reported progress on bills related to SLPA licensure, testing requirements, and AAC inclusion in IEP documentation. Pennsylvania previewed its upcoming June Hill Day, with a focus on Medicaid billing fee schedules and member engagement. ASHA introduced helpful tools, including the StateNet legislative tracker and salary supplement guidance, and encouraged creative data-gathering strategies like QR codes at presentations. The group looks ahead to continued collaboration during the next SEALs call on June 2.

As we move into the summer months, SEALs will continue their commitment to advocacy, legislative engagement and peer support. With major policy shifts underway at the federal level and dynamic changes occurring across states, the collective strength of the SEALs network remains a vital resource. We encourage all members to stay connected, contribute to upcoming discussions and bring forward the issues most impacting your school-based communities.

Hope Warner

Hope Warner, MS, CCC-SLP
PSHA SEAL Representative

Greetings From Your StAMP Representative



As many SLPs know, Medicare Part B payments were adjusted in January. Over the last several years, there have been minimal payment increases to certain services we provide. Most often the payment rates have been decreased. The Medicare Part B fee schedule for 2025 was determined under the last administration, using a longstanding process. As of January 2025, we are under a new administration with a different approach to establishing Medicare coverage policy and payments. It remains to be seen how the new approach will impact the role of SLPs and audiologists in caring for Medicare beneficiaries.

In April, the proposed rule for Medicare Part A payment was posted and many SLPs need to be aware of what is likely to impact coverage policy for the services we provide. Because the majority of the SLPs servicing Medicare Part A beneficiaries are working in skilled nursing facilities (SNFs), the link to the complete proposed rule is provided: <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/04/30/2025-06348/medicare-program-prospective-payment-system-and-consolidated-billing-for-skilled-nursing-facilities>. It is important to note that most of the same changes proposed for SNFs are also being proposed for inpatient rehab facilities (IRFs – rehab hospitals) and there is very serious consideration of applying them to home health agencies (HHAs). Two significant proposed changes are highlighted here:

ICD10 code mappings – Several primary diagnosis codes commonly used to qualify a patient for Medicare Part A services in a skilled nursing facility are proposed to be removed. The rationale presented in the proposed rule is that these can be addressed on an outpatient basis. SLPs should become familiar with the diagnoses impacted by this proposal. Often, there are challenges encountered by SLPs to get the diagnosis being treated included on the patient's medical record. Absence of the specific diagnosis code in the patient's medical record can result in denied coverage for the treatment.

Social Determinants of Health – Originally it was scheduled to begin collecting this information in October 2025. The proposal will not require SNFs to measure the patient's condition with respect to several social determinants of health. The measures would have collected patient conditions related to their living situation, food status (access/insecurity) and utilities. For Medicare beneficiaries who are compromised in these areas, removal of these measures further delays using these considerations when determining patient condition and need for services.

ASHA continues to advocate for the services we provide and to assure those we serve are not lost in a flurry of major policy changes. Currently, there are several advocacy efforts underway. In addition to what can be found on the PSHA website, you are encouraged to support the initiatives cited on the ASHA Take Action site: <https://www.asha.org/advocacy/takeaction/>. Please don't hesitate to contact your legislators. Your profession and those you serve depend on you!

Joanne M. Wisely

Joanne M. Wisely, MA, CCC-SLP, FNAP
PSHA StAMP Representative

Health Care and Telepractice (HCT) Committee



The HCT Committee of PSHA continues its commitment to supporting and advancing the practice of speech-language pathology across medical, private practice and tele-practice settings. The current committee chair is Akila Rajappa. Staci Sorrell is serving as chair-elect and will assume her role as chair in July. Lindsey Houtz will then take on the role of chair elect. Below is a summary of our recent updates and initiatives.

Private Practice Subcommittee

The HCT Private Practice Subcommittee, led by Emily Aten-Newberry, meets monthly to address private practice topics such as reimbursements, practice policies and more. On February 24, ASHA representatives—Meghan Ryan (Medicare) and Caroline Bergner (Medicaid)—presented to over 20 PSHA members on advocacy efforts. As Emily prepares to step down from her role, we are excited to welcome Jill Shook as the incoming subcommittee lead starting July 2025.

STAR Updates

The committee remains actively engaged with ASHA's StAR (State Advocates for Reimbursement) network. Theresa Jacopetti represents the HCT Committee in these monthly meetings. In response to Medicaid-related concerns raised by SLPs, PSHA members, including President-Elect Nicole Billak, Dana Bittetti and Akila Rajappa, met with Senator Fetterman's team on March 6. The group shared data from the national Medicaid survey and emphasized the value of communication and swallowing services. Members are

encouraged to continue sending letters to legislators to support Medicaid improvements.

PSHA Grand Rounds

Recent Grand Rounds sessions focused on ASL for medical SLPs and ALS, both of which received excellent attendance and feedback. Previous and upcoming sessions include:

- April 29 at 6:00pm – Topic: Starting a Private Practice in PA, Host: Jill Shook
- May 29 at 6:00pm – Topic: Esophageal Dysphagia, Host: Veronica Coresus, Teresa Rex
- June 18 at 6:30pm – Topic: Montessori-Based Therapy for Dementia, Host: Dr. Malathy Venkatesh, Asst. Professor, A.T. Still University, Arizona.
- July 23 at 6:00pm - Topic: Cognitive Impairments & Diabetes, Host: Lindsey Houtz

Promotional efforts are being expanded through social media and PSHA platforms.

Pending Legislation

The HCT Committee is monitoring several bills affecting speech-language pathology, including tele practice legislation and AI's role in healthcare. One key initiative involves supporting a bill from Representative Markosek aimed at increasing coverage for apraxia of speech. Another key initiative is the Interstate Compact, which would increase access to speech, language, and hearing services for Pennsylvanians by making it easier for speech-language pathologists and audiologists to work in Pennsylvania. The committee will continue to provide input and track legislative developments impacting the field.

Tri Alliance Collaboration

HCT members are collaborating with Tri Alliance and Highmark on insurance and reimbursement matters. A recent letter to state legislators spotlighted Pennsylvania's below-average reimbursement rates,

calling for action. Additionally, a statewide survey was distributed on the time and cost of prior authorizations. Contributors to this effort include Emily Aten-Newberry, Jill Shook, Nicole Billak, Akila Rajappa, Dana Bitetti, Nancy Carlino, Theresa Jacopetti, and Gretchen Myers. Ongoing meetings with Tri Alliance/Highmark aim to advocate for fair representation and reimbursement for SLPs.

Additional Updates & Advocacy

The committee remains engaged in PSHA advocacy activities, including participation in Hill Day. Members will also be involved in the upcoming PSHA Convention and future *Keystater* issues.

A \$2,500 social media grant was awarded to PSHA from ASHA, with 12 schools expressing interest in collaboration. A participating school will assist the HCT committee with social media outreach. Work is in progress, and NSSLHA chapters have been very active with their social media promotion work under the HCT committee guidance on healthcare promotion and wellness topics.

Upcoming HCT Committee Meetings

The HCT Committee remains committed to advocacy, education and improving healthcare outcomes for SLPs and our clients. We look forward to continued collaboration with members, partners, and legislators in support of our profession. If you would like more information about our committee or are interested in joining, we can be contacted at healthcarecommittee@psha.org. Our next scheduled meeting is June 18 at 5:30 pm.

Akila Rajappa

Akila Rajappa, PhD, CCC-SLP, BCS-S

Staci Sorrell

Staci Sorrell, MA, CCC-SLP
Health Care and Telepractice Committee

Student Voice

As the spring semester comes to a close, graduation processions begin, along with new chapters for students in our academic, research, and clinical journeys. Such a time of transition evokes self-reflection, excitement, bittersweet goodbyes and powerful new beginnings.

Reflecting on my time as the PSHA Student Representative, I can honestly say that I am unceasingly inspired by the dedication, passion and collaboration that students bring.

The last several months have teemed with new student focused initiatives to uplift PSHA Students, from the creation of our Student Mission statement, to our Moravian University NSSLHA sponsored DEIA and Government Relations Event, to our Content Creator Grant, and most notably, our beloved Student Track..

This past March, our Student Track was like no other. Themed “Waves of Possibility,” students from across the state came together to engage in collaboration, workshops and goal-setting. We learned together,

shared research findings, asked questions and grew as students and professionals. Such collaboration was a tangible reminder of the collective passion that unites PSHA Students.

It was an honor to welcome my remarkable predecessor, Mrs. Maggie Merk-Beach, MS, CCC-SLP, to share her valuable insights on preparing for our upcoming clinical journeys. Furthermore, our students loved hearing from Ms. Julie Raynor, CCC-SLP, about Camp Shout Out’s transformative work to uplift individuals who stutter. Finally, it was a privilege to co-facilitate a discursive workshop with Jessica Teichert on visionary leadership, catalyzing student-centered collaboration throughout Higher Education.

Through these experiences, I was continuously reminded of the brilliance, talents, gifts and strengths students bring to Higher Education and our academic discourse community. As students, we are not only the future of PSHA, but of two lucrative sectors of education and

healthcare. Thus, students’ voices, perspectives, and engagement are undeniably the foundation of a bright, equitable future for us as emerging professionals and the individuals we serve.

So, students, I would like to personally thank each of you for all that you do to enrich our PSHA Student Community. No matter where you are in your academic, clinical, or research journey, know that PSHA uplifts you, supports you and believes in you as a scholar, healthcare professional and as a visionary leader in speech and hearing health. Let us remember that our Student Track was just the beginning. Let us each be inspired to serve as visionary leaders on our own campuses, empowering each other as peers, classmates, and collaborators. Now, let us continue our journey to create waves of possibility.

Mary Jane Granito

Mary Jane Granito
PSHA Student Representative

Empowering Future Leaders: Visionary Leadership Workshop at PSHA Convention 2025

On March 21, 2025, I had the honor of co-hosting the inaugural Visionary Leadership workshop, “What Is My Why? Cultivating Visionary Leadership as Emerging Clinicians and Researchers,” during the PSHA Student Track. I was thrilled to lead this session alongside our incredible NSSLHA Student Delegate, Jessica Teichert.

After months of collaboration and creative planning, Jessica and I thoroughly enjoyed connecting with students from various universities. Together, we explored our passions, clarified our purpose and shared meaningful discussions. The

session guided participants in setting intentional S.M.A.R.T. goals and developing personal vision statements—tools to help them navigate their journey as future SLPs and audiologists.

The energy and enthusiasm students brought to the session reflected the heart of PSHA’s student community. Jessica and I designed this workshop as a hands-on, inspiring space that celebrates the collective drive and leadership our students already embody. PSHA students are not just the future of our organization—they are shaping the future of our profession.

Participants left the workshop feeling energized and empowered, equipped with clear goals and a vision to guide their next steps. I remain deeply inspired by the leadership and commitment our students bring to their campuses and beyond.

If you’re interested in hosting a Visionary Leadership workshop at your university or through your NSSLHA chapter, feel free to reach out to me at studentrep@psha.org.

Mary Jane Granito

Mary Jane Granito
PSHA Student Representative

PSHA National Speech-Language-Hearing Month Contest Winners

Congratulations to the following winners of the PSHA National Speech-Language-Hearing Month Contests! All winners will be posted to the PSHA website at <https://psha.org/who-we-are/national-speech-language-hearing-month/>

Essay Contest – 1st Place: Leo Dobson, SLP: Katherine Harouse, Dormont Elementary

The Effects of Better Speech and Hearing Travel Far and Wide

The effects of better speech and hearing are good. They are good because better hearing means that people can hear their friends and family. If you hear better you can talk because you hear the words. Better speech means friends, family and other people can understand you better. Better speech also means that people can understand you better and people can answer your questions or requests. Better hearing and speech have positive results. That is why the effects of better speech and hearing are positive.

Coloring Contest

1st Place: Jayden Dorsey
SLP: Kim Hamacher
Lincolnway Elementary School



2nd Place: Kayden Swailes
SLP: Kim Hamacher
Lincolnway Elementary School



3rd Place: Finn Rizzo
SLP: Katherine Harouse
Dormont Elementary



Drawing Contest

1st Place: Michael Mszanski
SLP: Katherine Harouse
Dormont Elementary



2nd Place: Evan Cortes
SLP: Lainey Nordone
Capital Area Intermediate Unit



3rd Place: Louis Greenwalt
SLP: Katherine Harouse
Dormont Elementary

