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PRESS RELEASE

National Disability Group Announces New Web Site to Empower Medicare Beneficiaries in Need of Wheelchairs and Scooters

January 11, 2005 – United Spinal Association, a national disability rights organization, announced today the creation of a new Web site dedicated to reversing Medicare's *in-the-home* policy, which restricts beneficiary access to needed wheelchairs and scooters. Rightwheelchair.org, a joint project of United Spinal Association, ITEM Coalition and the Clinician Task Force, will serve as a vehicle for inspiring grassroots activities and as a clearinghouse for information regarding Medicare's unfair coverage and administrative policies relating to mobility devices.

Visitors to Rightwheelchair.org will find important background information on Medicare's *in-the-home* restriction and they will have an opportunity to share their experiences in trying to obtain a wheelchair or scooter for themselves, a family member, or patient.

"The 'in-the-home' restriction severely impedes the health and independence of United Spinal's members and all individuals with disabilities, as it confines people to the four walls of their homes and does not take into account the need for people to access their physician's office, pharmacy, grocery store, bank or place of worship," said Kim Ruff-Wilbert, policy analyst for United Spinal Association. "It is our goal that through this Web site and the sharing of information, we can change this restrictive policy."

The Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), the Federal agency that decides which health care costs Medicare will cover, is currently in the process of re-evaluating its policy for power wheelchair and scooter reimbursements.

"We are pushing hard for CMS to finally address the 'in-the-home' restriction," stated Ruff-Wilbert. "In the meantime, we will continue our fight to preserve beneficiaries' access to their wheelchairs and encourage those affected by this policy to visit Rightwheelchair.org to learn how they can help in this battle for independence."

United Spinal Association is a Steering Committee member of the ITEM Coalition, whose purpose is to raise awareness and build support for policies that will improve access to assistive devices, technologies and related services for people of all ages with disabilities and chronic conditions. United Spinal Association is dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for individuals with spinal cord injury or disease by assuring quality health care, promoting research, advocating for civil rights and independence, educating the public about these issues and enlisting its help to achieve these fundamental goals.

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