

## Oxygen

I am a recipient of Rise Grant. I have two medical conditions called Hypermobility Ehlers Danlos and Dysautonomia. As a result of these conditions, I have had lifelong issues with my oxygenation levels and severe migraines.

As a high-risk individual during the pandemic, I rarely leave my home for anything other than medical appointments, some of which take more than an hour as they involve physical therapy and lymphedema drainage. When it became necessary to wear masks in public, I discovered that they caused my oxygen saturation to drop. In addition, my migraines became so severe that I would end up in bed for two days after wearing a mask for a single doctor's appointment. I was unable to work during these migraines. The situation was threatening my ability to receive medical care and earn a living as I own my own business.

My doctor prescribed oxygen for me due to this issue. It was a success. As long as I use oxygen supplementation while wearing a mask, I am able to go to my medical appointments and maintain my health and keep working. In addition, the oxygen has helped with the symptoms of my condition. As a result, I have had more energy to do my exercises. I have also been able to cut back on my migraine medication.

However, I am unable to obtain insurance coverage for the oxygen. After much research, I found out that the reason for this is that insurance companies like Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Vermont rely on Medical Equipment companies like Keene Medical to make the determination of eligibility.

Medical Equipment companies rely completely on the definition of eligibility under Medicare. Medicare requires that the patient must take a test to prove their oxygen desaturates to a certain level when walking. **However, they will not let you wear a COVID mask when taking the test even though the pandemic has been going on since March.** While I do not know whether I would have reached the low level required for coverage under Medicare (88%), it was verified at my physical therapist's office that my oxygen saturation dropped from 98% to 91% in 5 minutes while exercising in a mask, at which point I had to stop because I was in distress. I lost my appeal to Blue Cross for coverage even after two of my doctors explained the improvements resulting from the oxygen. As a result, I paid for the oxygen out of pocket at a cost of over \$50 per week until I received the RISE Grant. I am so relieved that my costs will be covered through this program and hope that by the time the funds are expended we will be able to go out in public without masks again.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my experience with the Rise Grant.