



4820 156th Place SW
Edmonds, WA 98026-4846
www.hearingloss-wa.org

October 28, 2017

The Honorable Jay Inslee
Governor, State of Washington
416 14th Avenue SW
Olympia, WA 98504

Dear Governor Inslee:

We ask that you restore coverage of hearing aids for adults under Medicaid in your supplemental budget request to the Legislature for the 2018 session. Effective 2011, the State removed coverage of hearing aids for adults from the Medicaid budget due to State budget reductions related to the economic recession. Medicaid (Apple Health) currently does cover hearing aids for people under the age of 21.

According to the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders, one in five adults has hearing loss. Thus, a similar proportion of adults covered by Medicaid may have hearing loss. Many adults are unable to obtain hearing aids because their cost—which typically exceeds \$2,500 for two aids and can be as high as \$8,000—is beyond their limited means. Medicare and most private insurance plans do not cover hearing aids, and other financing options are very limited.

For a Medicaid-eligible adult, the cost of hearing aids plus the required hearing evaluations and fitting appointments with audiologists or hearing aid dispensers is prohibitive. Therefore, a majority of our most vulnerable citizens are unable to obtain hearing aids and their hearing loss goes untreated.

The consequences of not treating hearing loss are significant. Hearing loss creates communication problems that result in confusion, inability to follow directions, problems in personal and work relationships, depression and isolation. Individuals with hearing loss may have an increased risk of falling and an accelerated rate of cognitive decline. Untreated hearing loss can be misdiagnosed as dementia, or the degree of dementia may be overestimated when a person has untreated hearing loss. The burden on caregivers of people with dementia is exacerbated when hearing loss is not treated. Over time, the costs of providing health care and social services for Medicaid-eligible adults with hearing loss will exceed the cost of providing hearing aids.

During the 2016 and 2017 State legislative sessions, there has been discussion of the need for coverage of hearing aids for adults under Medicaid. In 2017, the Senate unanimously approved legislation

The Honorable Jay Inslee
October 28, 2017
Page 2

(SB 5179) calling for coverage of hearing aids for adults under Medicaid in 2017, and the House Committee on Health Care & Wellness voted in support of the same legislation. But the compromise State budget approved this past July did not include a budget allocation for such coverage.

We ask that your supplemental budget for 2018 include funding for coverage of hearing aids for Medicaid-eligible adults. We believe legislators, having favored this benefit in 2017, will support your budget proposal.

As the State's economic situation has improved significantly since 2011, we ask that hearing aid coverage for adults on Medicaid be restored. This would be a very valuable, cost-effective health care measure to aid and protect some of our most vulnerable citizens.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at admin@hearingloss-wa.org for additional information.

Sincerely,



Warren Weissman, President
Washington State Association
Hearing Loss Association of America

cc: Jason McGill, Senior Policy Advisor, Health
David Schumacher, Director, Office of Financial Management