

## Untreated Hearing Loss is Prevalent in Aging Adults

### The Washington State Joint Legislative Executive Committee on Aging and Disability Recommends Restoration of Medicaid Adult Hearing Aid Coverage

#### Untreated Hearing Loss Adversely Impacts Health and Quality of Life

- Not hearing or misinterpreting words can mean **difficulty following instructions & gathering information to make decisions.**
- Hearing loss may lead to withdrawal from activities requiring hearing, such as conversation and participating in games or events. Untreated hearing loss has been **associated with social isolation and depression.**
- Individuals with hearing loss may have **increased risk of dementia**, an accelerated rate of cognitive decline, and more rapid brain volume loss as they age. Hearing loss may be **misdiagnosed as dementia** in that many symptoms are the same.
- Difficulty in communication **strains relationships** with family, friends, and caregivers hindering the ability to “Age in Place.”
- Lack of good communication skills restricts the ability to secure certain jobs and **affects earning capacity.**

#### Hearing Aids Improve Understanding, Communication and Quality of Life

- Hearing aid use improves the ability to communicate and can positively affect quality of life for both the hearing aid wearer and their partner **by reducing feelings of depression, anxiety, frustrations, social isolation and fatigue as well as risk of personal injury.**
- Hearing aids, aural rehabilitation and assistive listening technology can assist many persons with dementia **by reducing confusion and by facilitating communication with caregivers.** Reduced caregiver burden can postpone institutional care for a person with dementia, thus reducing costs.

**48 million Americans experience hearing loss, including 650,000 Washington State residents**  
WA ODH, 2009

**Nearly 25% of Americans aged 65 – 74, and 50% of those 75 and older have disabling hearing loss**  
NIDCD, 2011

**70% of Americans with hearing loss cite the high prices of hearing aids as prohibitive.**  
Better Hearing Institute

#### High Cost of Hearing Aids is a Barrier for Many

- \*At \$2,363 per aid (average; Hearing Review 2013), **hearing aids are unaffordable** for many low and middle-income seniors. Most health insurance plans do not cover hearing aids. The Hearing Loss Association of America recommends that two hearing aids should be the normal practice.
- Neither Medicare nor Washington State’s Medicaid plan cover adult hearing aids. Washington discontinued Medicaid coverage of hearing aids for adults effective January 2011. More than half of U.S. states have such coverage (HLAA-2015)

Untreated hearing loss among Washington’s poorest citizens contributes to increased Medicaid costs due to injuries related to hearing loss, mental health problems exacerbated by hearing loss, and loss of employment.