

# Restore Hearing Aid Coverage for Adults on Medicaid

*as proposed in the Governor's 2018 Supplemental Budget*

For Washingtonians with hearing loss, hearing aids provide a viable treatment, yet Washington's Medicaid plan discontinued hearing aid coverage for adults effective 2011 due to the State's budget constraints.

## Untreated Hearing Loss Harms Health and Contributes to Higher Medicaid Costs

- Untreated hearing loss can increase the occurrence of falls and mental health problems, raising the costs of Medicaid. Difficulty in hearing can cause miscommunication between patients and healthcare professionals.
- Difficulty in communication due to untreated hearing loss strains relationships with family, friends and caregivers, limiting the ability to "Age in Place."
- Untreated hearing loss may lead to withdrawal from social activities such as conversation, or from participation in games or events, leading to 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. A 2017 Lancet Commissions report entitled "Dementia Prevention, Intervention and Care" identified hearing loss as a potentially-modifiable risk factor for dementia.
- Since many symptoms of hearing loss and dementia are similar, untreated hearing loss may be misdiagnosed as dementia.

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

- Hearing aids improve communication and can positively affect quality of life for both hearing aid wearers and their families. Hearing aids reduce feelings of loneliness, depression, anxiety, frustration, social isolation and fatigue as well as risk of personal injury.
- Hearing aids 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.

## Restoration of Hearing Aid Coverage is a Sound and Necessary Investment

- 28 states offer hearing aid coverage for adults in their State Medicaid plan. Medicare does not cover hearing aids.
- The Governor's Supplemental Budget estimates restoration of hearing aid benefits for Medicaid-eligible adults will cost our state \$785,000 and that 6,300 adults will benefit.

**The 2016 Washington State Joint Legislative Executive Committee on Aging and Disability Issues Recommended Restoring Hearing Aid Coverage for Adults on Medicaid.**

## Support Restoration of Hearing Aid Coverage for Adults on Medicaid



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