

April 2, 2024

Chairman Joseph Vitale
Senate Health, Human Services, and Senior Citizens Committee
125 West State Street
Trenton, NJ 08625

SENT VIA EMAIL

Re: SB 1171

Dear Chairman Vitale and members of the Committee,

I am writing on behalf of the American Academy of Audiology (the Academy) in support of Senate Bill 1171 which would expand New Jersey Medicaid to cover hearing aids, cochlear implants, and related accessories and services for eligible adults. The Academy represents the interests of approximately 14,000 audiologists nationwide and is dedicated to providing quality hearing and balance care services through professional development, education, research, and increased public awareness of hearing and balance disorders.

Hearing aids are medical electronic devices designed to capture, process, and amplify sound for individuals diagnosed with hearing loss. Cochlear implants are implantable electronic medical devices designed to restore the ability to perceive sounds and understand speech for individuals with moderate to severe hearing loss for whom traditional hearing aids are not sufficient to treat their level of hearing loss. Expanding Medicaid coverage to provide hearing aids and cochlear implants to the adult population would reap benefits for the beneficiaries and the state alike. Hearing loss has been consistently associated with lower levels of employment and income, as low educational attainment and difficulty communicating may decrease job prospects.¹ In addition, individuals who receive a cochlear implant generally increase their median income by \$10-12,000 annually² and thereby reduce usage of state disability and welfare services.

Studies have shown the harmful health consequences of untreated hearing loss for older individuals. Even with only mild hearing loss, individuals are three times more likely to experience a fall, which is the leading cause of fatal injury for Americans over age 65.³ In addition to the risk of falling, another study found that hearing aids reduced the rate of cognitive decline in older adults, who are at a higher risk of dementia, by almost 50% over three years.⁴ A 2017 Cochrane review looked at five studies that covered over 800 adults aged 69 to 83 having mild to moderate hearing loss and concluded that hearing aids are

¹ [Socioeconomic position and hearing loss: current understanding and recent advances - PMC \(nih.gov\)](#)

² [The economic and societal benefits of adult cochlear implant implantation: A pilot exploratory study - PubMed \(nih.gov\)](#)

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (May 2018) *Deaths from Falls Among Persons Aged ≥65 Years — United States, 2007–2016*. <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/67/wr/mm6718a1.htm>;

⁴ [Hearing intervention versus health education control to reduce cognitive decline in older adults with hearing loss in the USA \(ACHIEVE\): a multicentre, randomised controlled trial - The Lancet](#)

an effective intervention to improve engagement in everyday activities, quality of life, and the ability to listen to others.¹

Expanding Medicaid coverage to include hearing aids and cochlear implants for adults holds the potential to significantly improve the well-being of lower-income individuals. Untreated hearing loss can exacerbate disparities and lead to adverse outcomes for patients across all age groups. Enacting this bill would guarantee that individuals of every socioeconomic background have access to vital communication tools and the ability to fully engage in society. We support the need to broaden access to hearing aids and strongly encourage the Committee to pass Senate Bill 1171, extending its coverage to encompass those in need under Medicaid. Should you have any questions or require further clarification on this matter, or the details presented, please do not hesitate to reach out to Susan Pilch, Senior Director of Government Relations at spilch@audiology.org.

Sincerely,



Bopanna Ballachanda, PhD
President, American Academy of Audiology

¹ Ferguson MA, Kitterick PT, Chong LY, Edmondson-Jones M, Barker F, Hoare DJ. Hearing aids for mild to moderate hearing loss in adults. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2017, Issue 9. Art. No.: CD012023. Available at: <https://www.cochranelibrary.com/cdsr/doi/10.1002/14651858.CD012023.pub2/full?highlightAbstract=hearing%7Ccaids%7Caid%7Chear>. Accessed on January 26, 2024.