

Health & Human Services Committee

Chair Melissa Wiklund

March 2nd, 2023**SF 2105 – Senator Liz Boldon – Hearing Aid Insurance Coverage**

Dear Chair Wiklund and members of the Senate Health & Human Services Committee,

The Minnesota Council on Disability supports SF 2105, which eliminates the age restriction for hearing aid coverage under Minnesota health plans. Currently, under Minnesota law, health insurance plans are required to cover hearing aids for Minnesotans 18 or younger, however, hearing loss does not disappear once a person becomes an adult. Hearing loss impacts Minnesotans of all ages and the number of Minnesotans with disabling hearing loss increases exponentially with age.

Hearing loss has a profound impact on a person's ability to communicate. Because of the high cost of hearing aids, the average person waits an average of 13 years from the onset of hearing loss symptoms to seek treatment, which diminishes the effectiveness of hearing aids to assist in speech comprehension. Only one in four adults who could benefit from hearing aids, actually use them, with cost being the number one reason for avoiding them. Untreated hearing loss also puts Minnesotans at a greater risk of dementia, loss of speech comprehension, and social isolation.

The cost of hearing aids is unaffordable for most Minnesotans, at an average \$4,000-\$6,000 for a pair. Low cost over-the-counter (OTC) hearing aids, while a great alternative for those with mild hearing loss, are not powerful enough for those with moderate to profound hearing losses. Moderate to profound hearing losses also require more specialized expertise by ENTs, Audiologist, or Hearing Specialist to fit hearing aids. Medicare and private health insurance plans typically do not cover hearing aids for adults and hearing aids are one of the only durable medical equipment (DME) expenses not covered by insurance or waivers.

Untreated hearing loss has a profound impact on a person's ability to maintain employment, communicate with others, and has lasting, irreversible cognitive consequences. Hearing loss can lead to social isolation, especially for those 65 and older. The high cost of hearing aids only compounds these negative effects. Society creates insurmountable barriers for those with hearing loss, but the burden of removing those costly barriers is placed on those with hearing loss, which is of no fault of their own. Hearing loss has negative impacts on all rungs of society, but that can be alleviated with affordable hearing aids.

We urge members of the health and human services committee to support inclusivity and basic human dignity by supporting SF 2105, which makes hearing aids accessible and affordable for everyone.

Sincerely,



Trevor Turner

Public Policy Director