

SUBJECT TO RESOLUTION COMMITTEE REVIEW

AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION HOUSE OF DELEGATES

Resolution: 114
(N-21)

Introduced by: New Mexico

Subject: Medicare and Private Health Insurance for Hearing Aids

Referred to: Reference Committee A

1 Whereas, Hearing loss affects one in eight people in the United States (13 percent, or 30
2 million) aged 12 years or older with hearing loss in both ears, based on standard hearing
3 examinations. About 2 percent of adults aged 45 to 54 have disabling hearing loss. The rate
4 increases to 8.5 percent for adults aged 55 to 64; and

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6 Whereas, Hearing aids are considered not a covered benefit by Medicare, Medicaid, and most
7 other payers, resulting in depriving nearly two thirds of patients who would benefit from having
8 hearing aids; and

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10 Whereas, Hearing loss contributes to the isolation, depression, memory loss and dementia of
11 patients, all of which are major health problems; and

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13 Whereas, Impoverished patients with hearing loss suffer from worse health disparities, because
14 of the inability to access health care by telemedicine or telephone; and

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16 Whereas, The isolation is made worse by the COVID Pandemic; therefore be it

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18 RESOLVED, That our American Medical Association support Congress expanding Medicare
19 Coverage for medical grade hearing aids (New HOD Policy); and be it further

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21 RESOLVED, That our AMA advocate for coverage with minimal copays or coinsurance for
22 medical-grade hearing aids as medically necessary for all health insurance, including Medicaid.
23 (Directive to Take Action)

Fiscal Note: Not yet determined

Received: 10/12/21

AUTHORS STATEMENT OF PRIORITY

The NMMS submits a single resolution for the 2021 AMA Interim Meeting.

1. Hearing loss affects one in eight people in the United States (13% or 30 million).
2. Hearing loss contributes to the isolation, depression, memory loss and dementia of patients.
3. Medical grade hearing aids are expensive at \$3000+ each.
4. HR 1118, "Medicare Hearing Aid Coverage Act of 2021" was introduced on 2/18/2021. The bill would allow Medicare coverage of hearing aids and related examinations by amending title XVIII of the Social Security Act to remove the exclusion of Medicare coverage.
5. Excerpts from the Lancet (www.thelancet.com, Vol 396, August 8, 2020) summarize the concern precisely, "increased risk of dementia per 10 dB or worsening of hearing loss... midlife hearing impairment measured by audiometry, is associated with steeper temporal lobe volume loss, including in the hippocampus and entorhinal cortex... hearing loss was only associated with worse cognition in those not using hearing aids... immediate and delayed recall deteriorated less after initiation of hearing aid use... Hearing aid use was the largest factor protecting from decline... prospective studies suggest hearing aid use is protective."

The goal of the NMMS resolution is to require Medicare, private insurance, and Medicaid to purchase for prescription, medical-grade hearing aids for patients to prevent decline in cognition, and progression into dementia, in those with hearing loss.

RELEVANT AMA POLICY

Hearing Aid Coverage H-185.929

1. Our AMA supports public and private health insurance coverage that provides all hearing-impaired infants and children access to appropriate physician-led teams and hearing services and devices, including digital hearing aids.
2. Our AMA supports hearing aid coverage for children that, at minimum, recognizes the need for replacement of hearing aids due to maturation, change in hearing ability and normal wear and tear.
3. Our AMA encourages private health plans to offer optional riders that allow their members to add hearing benefits to existing policies to offset the costs of hearing aid purchases, hearing-related exams and related services.
4. Our AMA supports coverage of hearing tests administered by a physician or physician-led team as part of Medicare's Benefit.
5. Our AMA supports policies that increase access to hearing aids and other technologies and services that alleviate hearing loss and its consequences for the elderly.
6. Our AMA encourages increased transparency and access for hearing aid technologies through itemization of audiologic service costs for hearing aids.
7. Our AMA supports the availability of over-the-counter hearing aids for the treatment of mild-to-moderate hearing loss.

Citation: CMS Rep. 6, I-15; Appended: Res. 124, A-19