



CHAIRPERSON
John Ryan

EXECUTIVE OFFICER
Jane Adcock

February 25, 2013

The Honorable Holly Mitchell, Chair
Assembly Budget Sub 1 Committee
on Health and Human Services
State Capitol, Room 2163
Sacramento, CA 94249-0054

Re: Hearing Aid Services under Medi-Cal

Dear Assembly Member Mitchell:

The California Mental Health Planning Council (Council) is mandated by federal and state statute to advocate on behalf of children with serious emotional disturbance and adults with serious mental illness. We also advise state and federal administrations and legislators on impacts and successful practices in mental health services.

➤ **Advocacy**

➤ **Evaluation**

➤ **Inclusion**

We are writing today in regard to the upcoming hearing on February 28th, which will include hearing aids, and asking that the Assembly Budget Sub 1 Committee consider the recent changes in coverage that have affected those who are deaf or hard of hearing. Our constituents have informed us that their Medi-Cal benefits have been reduced to the point that they cannot even get an appointment with their audiologist due to the recent Medi-Cal budget cuts. Chronic hearing loss is a condition that incrementally diminishes through a progressive decline of audial acuity. This loss eventually becomes a life or death safety issue. In order to provide adequate service, hearing aids require consistent and periodic exams and adjustments to accommodate the hearing loss as it progresses. This routine and medically-necessary attention has essentially been eliminated if doctors will no longer accept Medi-Cal patients.

Many people living with hearing loss are on a fixed income, particularly if they are elderly. Expecting a 50% contribution for routine maintenance is unreasonable and unjust. It is not only a quality of life but a safety issue if a person is unable to participate in daily events or maintain awareness of his or her surroundings. State law requires employers and a public venue to provide reasonable accommodation to the hearing impaired in order to gain full participation but exempts itself from that inclusive effort by denying coverage.

Medi-Cal will cover the cost of a cochlear implant but will not cover routine maintenance that enables the hearing impaired to be full participants in the world. The Council asks that the Assembly Budget Sub 1 Committee address this issue during the special session and upcoming months. We ask that benefits be sufficient enough to ensure that routine maintenance is covered. We also suggest that alternative interventions, such as "wi-fi" - type transmitters and hearing aid receivers, be investigated and approved as a less expensive, lower risk alternative to cochlear implants.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue. If you have any questions, or would like additional information, please contact our Executive Officer, Jane Adcock, at jane.adcock@cmhpc.ca.gov or phone (916) 319-9343. We appreciate your recognition and support for adequate health services and are optimistic that the basics can be restored.

Sincerely,



Barbara Mitchell, Co-Chair
CMHPC Advocacy Committee



Gail Nickerson, Co-Chair
CMHPC Advocacy Committee



John Ryan, Chair
California Mental Health Planning Council

cc: Ed Hernandez, Chair, Senate Health Committee
Richard Pan, Chair, Assembly Committee on Health
Scott Bain, Consultant, Senate Health
Teri Boughton, Chief Consultant, Assembly Health