

Children's Special Health Care Services

Statement of Problem

Michigan's commitment to children with hearing loss is demonstrated by providing hearing aids through the Children's Special Health Care Services (CSHCS) program. On February 1, 2009, a change in policy [Bulletin Number MSA 09-03] went into effect which, while improving access to advances in hearing aid technology, creates new obstacles for children in need of replacement hearing aids. The change in policy increases the replacement interval for hearing aids to five years. Previously, hearing aids could be replaced every three years without prior authorization. While Michigan Medicaid Approved Policy Bulletin MSA 09-28 indicates that Medicaid provides hearing aids to children from birth to 21 years of age, there are reported instances in the state where children have been denied coverage of hearing aids by Medicaid.

Facts

- Of all birth defects screened for at the time of birth, hearing loss is the most common; 2 to 3 out of every 1,000 children in the United States are born deaf or hard of hearing.
- Fitting hearing aids to a child is unique: as children grow their ears undergo continuous anatomical and physiological changes.
- The response to sound matures as the child develops. Sound discrimination ability sharpens, making the requirements of fitting hearing aids to a child very different from those of adults.
- Children with hearing loss often experience delayed development of speech, language and cognitive skills, which may result in slow learning, difficulty progressing in school and problems with social integration.
- As a child grows they are at a competitive disadvantage, may have trouble getting a job when they are older, and in general may be paid less placing a heavy economic burden on the individual, family and community.
- The burden of hearing loss and deafness falls disproportionately on the poor, because they are unable to afford the preventive and routine care necessary to avoid hearing loss or to afford hearing aids to make the condition manageable [World Health Organization, Fact sheet N° 300, March 2006].
- By slowing progress in school and the workplace, and placing people in social isolation, hearing loss can make it more difficult to escape poverty.
- In 2007 – 2008 the percentage of children in Michigan on Medicaid was 58.4% as compared to 59.7% in the US.

Solutions (For Legislators)

Legislators, 1) take steps to return replacement intervals of hearing aids for children covered by CSHCS to every three years without prior authorization; 2) take steps to reinstate the provision of hearing aids to eligible children covered by Medicaid, and; 3) place decision making regarding binaural hearing aid fittings in the hands of experts in hearing health care – the professional audiologist or hearing aid dealer.

The above fact sheet is included in the booklet sent to legislators. The “Solution” above is what we would like to see legislators do regarding this issue. How can you advocate for this issue? Please read on.

Discuss this issue, the facts that support the problem and suggested solutions, with your legislators. Make them aware how important it is that every child be given the opportunity to become a successful and productive member of society.