



ASHA
American
Speech-Language-Hearing
Association

January 26, 2024

The Honorable Julie Willoughby
1700 W Washington Street
Capitol Complex, Room 306
Phoenix, AZ 85007

RE: Hearing Aid Coverage; HB 2112

Dear Representative Willoughby:

On behalf of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, I write to express support, with recommended amendments, for House Bill 2112, which provides hearing aid and related service coverage to those under 18 years old or under 21 if they are still enrolled in high school.

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) is the national professional, scientific, and credentialing association for 228,000 members and affiliates who are audiologists; speech-language pathologists; speech, language, and hearing scientists; audiology and speech-language pathology assistants; and students. Over 3,400 ASHA members reside in Arizona.¹

House Bill 2112 provides critical support for reducing instances of untreated hearing loss. Studies have linked untreated hearing loss to many social and economic factors, including depression, withdrawal from social situations, reduced alertness and increased risk to personal safety, impaired memory and ability to learn new tasks, reduced job performance and earning potential, and diminished psychological and overall health.²

Approximately 15% of school-age children have some degree of hearing loss in one or both ears, with 5.4% (or about 1 in 20) having less severe or unilateral hearing loss.³ Academic achievement and social functioning are significantly impacted by even a mild to moderate hearing loss, which may bring about difficulty in learning and building important interpersonal skills necessary to healthy self-esteem. In fact, over one-third of children with a lesser degree of or unilateral hearing loss are projected to fail at least one grade or will require additional educational support, which is estimated to cost the educational system over \$5.5 billion.⁴

ASHA recommends the following clarifying amendment to Section 20-1057.20.A, new language in **red** (deletions underlined):

A health care services organization that issues, amends, delivers or renews an evidence of coverage shall provide coverage for a hearing aid and any related services for **one hearing aid per hearing impaired ear up to \$2,200 total** FOR THE FULL COST OF ONE HEARING AID PER HEARING IMPAIRED EAR UP TO \$2,200 every thirty-six months for an enrollee who is under eighteen years of age or who is under twenty-one years of age if the enrollee is still attending high school. The enrollee may choose a higher priced hearing aid and may pay the difference in cost above the \$2,200 limit without financial or contractual penalty to the enrollee or the provider of the hearing aid.

Although hearing instrument specialists are granted permissions to fit any age with hearing aids in Arizona, ASHA believes it is important that patients under the age of 18 with hearing loss be

evaluated and managed by licensed audiologists who are health care professionals trained and educated with either master's or doctoral degrees in the field of audiology. Hearing instrument specialists are not trained beyond solely recommending and fitting hearing aids.

Thank you for helping to ensure that the youth of Arizona have access to hearing aids, which will help them to fully participate in their learning environments and daily living activities. If you or your staff have any questions, please contact Eileen Crowe, ASHA's director, state association relations, at ecrowe@asha.org.

Sincerely,



Tena L. McNamara, AuD, CCC-A/SLP
2024 ASHA President

¹ American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (2022). *Arizona* [Quick Facts]. <https://www.asha.org/siteassets/advocacy/state-fliers/arizona-state-flyer.pdf>.

² Jayakody, D. M. P., Wishart, J., Stegeman, I., Eikelboom, R., Moyle, T. C., Yiannos, J. M., Goodman-Simpson, J. J., & Almeida, O. P. (2022). Is There an Association Between Untreated Hearing Loss and Psychosocial Outcomes? *Frontiers in aging neuroscience*, 14, 868673. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnagi.2022.868673>.

³ Niskar, A.S., Kieszak, S.M., Holmes, A., Esteban, E, Rubin, C., & Brody, D.J. (1998). Prevalence of hearing loss among children 6 to 19 years of age: the Third National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey. *JAMA*, 279(14), 1071–1075. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.279.14.1071>.

⁴ Tharpe A.M. Unilateral and Mild Bilateral Hearing Loss in Children: Past and Current Perspectives. *Trends in Amplification*. 2008;12(1):7-15. doi:[10.1177/1084713807304668](https://doi.org/10.1177/1084713807304668).