

Submitted on Thu, 02/10/2022 - 13:59

Name

Ruby Baker

Affiliation, if applicable

Community of Vermont Elders

Town/City

Montpelier

Topic

Other

Comment

February 10, 2022

Dear Members of the Green Mountain Care Board,

Hear! Hear! Vermont is a statewide coalition composed of organizations and individuals advocating for health insurance coverage for hearing aids and hearing loss services in Vermont. We are dedicated to promoting the health, wellbeing and equity of Vermonters with hearing loss. We strongly urge the Green Mountain Care Board to rule in favor of a specific and concrete recommendation that hearing aids and hearing loss services be covered in the state's federal application to update the Essential Health Benefits (EHB) Benchmark Plans offered in Vermont.

Based on preliminary actuarial estimates by the Department of Federal Regulation's contractor, Wakely, the rate impact of covering hearing aids and hearing loss services is de minimus, ranging from .05% to .09%. The premium impact is projected by Wakely to be equally as small. These estimates meet the required tests set out by the federal government to update care without requiring state revenue and are in line with EHB expansion proposals that other states have been already approved for under this federal process.

Over 17% of all Vermonters across age groups suffer from hearing loss. Vermont and Pennsylvania are the only two Northeast states with no hearing aid coverage in their commercial EHB plans. People with untreated hearing loss have lower rates of graduating from high school and college, being employed and making wages above poverty levels. Research in the last decade has found that untreated hearing loss increases negative health outcomes in many areas - including dementia, mental health and injury from falls. Treating hearing loss, however, provides a return-on-investment to Vermont from increased health savings due to improved communication with healthcare providers that lead to better health outcomes.

Over 2000 Vermonters have signed our petition, "Let Vermont Hear," in support of health coverage for hearing aids and we have worked hard to bring this issue before the Green Mountain Care Board. Vermonters who are hearing disabled are wrongly excluded from accessing care and services for one of their primary health concerns. That needs to change and gaining coverage for Vermonters that have EHB Benchmark plans would be a meaningful step.

Sincerely,

Hear! Hear! Vermont

Your public comment will be shared with the Board. To promote transparency, the Board sometimes posts public comments on its website. Are you okay with the Board posting your comment? If no, your comment will be sent to the Board but not posted.

Yes