

TO THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA:

The background to this petition is as follows:

- 1) A hearing aid is a battery-powered electronic device designed to improve an individual's ability to perceive sound. Worn in or behind a person's ear, they make some sounds louder, helping people hear better when it's quiet and when it's noisy.
- 2) People who suffer hearing loss whether due to aging, illness, employment, or accident, not only lose the ability to communicate effectively with friends, family, or colleagues, they also can experience unemployment, social isolation, and struggles with mental health.
- 3) Hearing loss can also impact the safety of an individual with hearing loss as it affects the ability to hear cars coming, safety alarms, call 911, etc.
- 4) A global commission on the state of the research for dementia care and prevention released an updated consensus report in July 2020, identifying 12 key risk factors for dementia and cognitive decline. The strongest risk factor that was indicated was hearing loss. It was calculated that up to 8% of the total number of dementia cases could potentially be avoided with management of hearing loss.
- 5) Hearing aids are therefore essential to the mental health and well-being of Manitobans. Especially to those at significant risk of dementia/Alzheimer's, a disorder of the brain affecting cognition, in the ever growing senior population.
- 6) Audiologists are health care professionals who help patients decide which kind of hearing aid will work best for them, based on the type of hearing loss, patient's age and ability to manage small devices, lifestyle and ability to afford.
- 7) The cost of hearing aids can be prohibitive to many Manitobans depending on their income and circumstances. Hearing aids cost on average \$995 to \$4,000 per ear, and many professionals say the hearing aids only work at their best for five years.
- 8) Manitoba residents under the age of 18 who require a hearing aid, as prescribed by an otolaryngologist or audiologist, will receive either an 80% reimbursement from Manitoba Health of a fixed amount for an analog device, up to a maximum of \$500 per ear or 80% of a fixed amount for a digital or analog programmable device, up to a maximum of \$1800. However, this reimbursement is not available to Manitobans who need the device who are over the age of 18 which will result in financial hardship for many young people entering the workforce, students, and families. In addition, seniors representing 14.3% of Manitoba's population, are not eligible for reimbursement despite being the group most likely in need of a hearing aid.
- 9) Most insurance companies only provide a minimal partial cost of a hearing aid and many Manitobans, especially retired persons, old age pensioners, and other low-income earners do not have access to health insurance plans.
- 10) The province of Quebec's Hearing Devices Program covers all costs related to hearing aids and assistive listening devices, including the purchase, repair and replacement.
- 11) Alberta offers subsidies to all seniors (65 and over) and low-income adults (18-64) once every five years.
- 12) New Brunswick provides coverage for the purchase and maintenance not covered by other agencies or private health insurance plans, as well as assistance for those for whom the purchase would cause financial hardship.
- 13) Manitobans over age 18 are only eligible for support for hearing aids if they are receiving Employment and Income Assistance and the reimbursement only provides a maximum of \$500 an ear.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

- 1) To urge the Provincial Government to consider hearing loss as a medical treatment under Manitoba Health.
- 2) To urge the Provincial Government to provide income based coverage for hearing aids to all who need them as hearing has been proven to be essential to Manitobans' cognitive, mental, and social health and well-being.

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