

EHB-Benchmark Plan Selection Public Comment

Nine years ago when I became a parent, I had no idea that my journey of parenthood would include having two of my three biological children born with hearing loss. This was a new experience for my partner and I, as neither of us have family history of hearing loss. We were grateful that both of our sons first pairs of hearing aids were able to be provided through the state hearing aid loan bank, but we weren't sure how we would pay for future pairs of hearing aids, as they were not and still are not covered under my health insurance as a State of Kansas employee.

Prior to becoming a parent of children with hearing loss, my partner and I planned on starting savings funds for our children to use towards the purchasing of a car, college, or however they deemed necessary when they transition into adulthood. The plan we did not consider, was having to pay \$3,000 per child every 4-5 years when they need new hearing aids. This guarantees us to spend at minimum of \$24,000 on hearing aids by the time our sons reach 16 years of age due to lack of hearing aid coverage by our health insurance. The only way they would be covered by our health insurance, is if our family was eligible for Medicaid, which we are not due to our income being above the cap for our family size.

According to the KDHE website, 3 in 1000 children are born with hearing loss, which is up from the 1 in 1000 children that were born with hearing loss less than ten years ago. There are approximately 225,000 people in the state of Kansas who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing, with just about 10% of these folks with the fluency and ability to communicate fully in American Sign Language. This might lead you to believe that the remaining 200,000 D/HH folks would be able to utilize spoken English, but this is determined by one factor. Do they have access to spoken language via hearing aids or cochlear implants?

This leads me to bring to your attention to the fact that 90% of Deaf children are born to hearing parents, and only 20% of those parents learn sign language to be able to communicate with their child. Why is this? Perhaps it's because the first intervention offered to parents after their child fails the newborn hearing screening is a referral to an audiologist, who will then prescribe them hearing aids. If this is the first line of intervention, why would insurance companies not be mandated to provide coverage for this? It is a prescribed treatment, after all, for a diagnosed medical condition of hearing loss. Without language- be that spoken English, which the child would have access to via hearing aids, or American Sign Language, children become at-risk for experiencing Language Deprivation Syndrome. Language Deprivation Syndrome causes the child to experience delays in all areas of development- social, emotional, and educational which has long term implications for their success in life.

Truthfully, I could go on and on about Deafness, hearing loss, and tell you all about all the systemic barriers to people who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing, but that's not what this is about. I write you to ask you to please eliminate one barrier for families of children with hearing loss, and mandate that insurance companies provide coverage for hearing aids without an age limit, as I'm quite certain my children will never not need hearing aids.

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