



Kids Can't Wait: Policymakers Must Include Hearing Aids in California's New Health Insurance Benchmark

What's the issue?

1. **More than 20,000 California children and youth who need access to hearing aids do not have them covered by their private health insurance.** In fact, only 1 in 10 families in California with private insurance have some coverage for hearing aids. Advocates and legislators have tried for several years to add hearing aids as a benefit—most recently [SB 635](#) (Menjivar) in 2023 was **vetoed**.
2. **More than 30 states** already require that private individual and group health insurance plans include coverage for children's hearing aids & services. California should join them.
3. **The current stop-gap program* has been ineffective by design—over three years in and with tens of millions of dollars available, only a couple hundred kids have been able to get hearing aids.** In fact, 84% of spending on the program last year (FY 2023-24) went to a private administrative vendor rather than on hearing aids and services for kids. It's just not the right solution for California families struggling with health care affordability.

Why does this matter?

Pediatric hearing loss requires timely intervention to prevent permanent delays. The consequences when children don't have access to care are not only devastating for the child and family; they are costly to society. These outcome include:

- Developmental and communication delays
- Barriers to learning and socialization with peers
- Depression and mental health issues
- Medical debt for families
- Greater public spending on special education

“We need to act now—a developmental emergency is evolving right now for every child in California without hearing aids due to inadequate insurance coverage.”

Dr. Dylan Chan MD, PhD, FAAP, Director, Children's Communication Center, Associate Professor, Pediatric Otolaryngology Head and Neck Surgery—University of California, San Francisco

What's the opportunity?

In 2024, a process was started to update the state's "benchmark" plan, which will set a new minimum standard for commercial insurance health coverage. It is critical that hearing aids for children are included in the new benefit design. This means the administration and Legislature must work with stakeholders to identify updates to the state's benchmark essential health insurance benefits that include hearing aids. Authorizing legislation must also be approved. This work needs to happen by May 2025 so that hearing aids can become a covered benefit for Californians in 2027. **Policymakers must ensure California kids have access to hearing aids!**

*The Hearing Aid Coverage for Children Program (HACCP) was created in 2021. It is administered by the Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) which subcontracts some administrative services (like application processing) to the vendor MAXIMUS.