
A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO HEARING AIDS.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF HAWAII:

1 SECTION 1. The legislature finds that approximately three
2 to four out of every one thousand children born in Hawaii are
3 identified as having permanent hearing loss. According to the
4 National Institutes of Health, about one-third of Americans
5 between the ages of sixty-five and seventy-five and around
6 one-half of those older than seventy-five have some degree of
7 hearing loss.

8 According to the Lions Club, the cost for one digital
9 hearing aid can be around \$3,000 or more. Some people with
10 permanent conductive hearing loss, for whom conventional hearing
11 aids are not appropriate, may benefit from amplification through
12 bone conduction hearing aids, which can also cost over \$3,000.
13 Furthermore, about fifty per cent of childhood hearing loss is
14 due to genetic causes, meaning that more than one member in a
15 family may need to wear hearing aids, thereby multiplying the
16 financial burden of purchasing hearing aids.



1 The legislature also finds that, currently, most health
2 insurance plans in Hawaii cover the purchase of hearing aids,
3 but the amount of coverage may be low, leaving the patient with
4 a large copayment. As a result, it is not unusual for people
5 with hearing loss to choose to delay or forgo the purchase of
6 hearing aids because they are unable to pay for them. A 2005
7 study by the Better Hearing Institute estimated that untreated
8 hearing loss resulted in a loss of income per household of up to
9 \$12,000 per year. Hawaii's medicaid managed care plans cover
10 hearing aid evaluation, selection, purchase, and fitting every
11 three years, and subsequent hearing aid checks, hearing testing,
12 ear molds, repairs, and batteries. However, federal medicare
13 insurance plans for the elderly do not cover hearing aid
14 purchases and related services, and only cover hearing testing.

15 According to the American Speech-Language-Hearing
16 Association, twenty-five states currently mandate insurance
17 coverage for hearing aids. In states that specify the frequency
18 of replacing hearing aids, the range is every two to five years,
19 with thirteen of those states requiring replacement every three
20 years. Fifteen states have parameters on the amount of coverage



1 that the insurance companies must provide, ranging from \$1,400
2 to \$4,000 per ear or hearing aid.

3 The legislature further finds that in 2014, the auditor
4 published a study of Proposed Mandatory Health Insurance for
5 Hearing Aids, Report No. 14-10, October 2014, a sunrise study on
6 the advisability of mandating insurance coverage for hearing
7 aids, as proposed in S.B. No. 309, S.D. 1 (2013) (S.B. No. 309).
8 The auditor found that most insurance plans in Hawaii already
9 covered or planned to cover the cost of hearing aids by 2015 and
10 that although the coverage levels at that time might require a
11 large copayment, those insurance plans would have complied with
12 S.B. No. 309, had it been enacted. The legislature notes that
13 the auditor's report expressed concerns that S.B. No. 309, had
14 no limits on coverage, such as minimum or maximum costs covered
15 by insurers or frequency of placement.

16 In response to the auditor's report, S.B. No. 2439, S.D. 2
17 (2022) (S.B. No. 2439), proposed a minimum coverage benefit of
18 \$1,500 per hearing aid for each hearing-impaired ear every
19 thirty-six months. The legislature adopted S.C.R. No. 61,
20 S.D. 1, H.D. 1 (2022), which requested the auditor to perform a
21 social and financial assessment of S.B. No. 2439, as required by



1 section 23-51, Hawaii Revised Statutes; however, has not
2 received a report from the auditor at this point.

3 The purpose of this Act is to require optional health
4 insurance coverage in the State for hearing aids for all types
5 of hearing loss at a minimum coverage benefit of \$1,500 per
6 hearing aid for each hearing-impaired ear every thirty-six
7 months.

8 SECTION 2. Chapter 431, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is
9 amended by adding a new section to article 10A to be
10 appropriately designated and to read as follows:

11 **"§431:10A- Optional coverage for hearing aids. (a)**
12 Each individual and group accident and health or sickness
13 policy, contract, plan, or agreement issued or renewed in the
14 State on or after January 1, 2026, shall provide optional
15 coverage for the cost of hearing aids for the policyholder and
16 individuals covered under the policy, contract, plan, or
17 agreement.

18 (b) Hearing aid purchases covered under this section shall
19 be subject to a minimum benefit of \$1,500 per hearing-impaired
20 ear every thirty-six months.



1 (c) The policyholder and individual covered under the
2 policy, contract, plan, or agreement may choose a hearing aid
3 that is priced higher than the benefit payable under this
4 section without financial or contractual penalty to the provider
5 of the hearing aid.

6 (d) This section shall not prohibit an insurer subject to
7 this section from providing optional coverage that is greater or
8 more favorable to the policyholder and individuals covered under
9 the policy, contract, plan, or agreement.

10 (e) Optional coverage required under this section may be
11 subject to deductibles, copayments, coinsurance, or annual or
12 maximum payment limits that are consistent with deductibles,
13 copayments, coinsurance, and annual or maximum payment limits
14 applicable to other similar coverage under the policy, contract,
15 plan, or agreement.

16 (f) Any literature or correspondence an insurer sends to
17 policyholders, including annual information that is made
18 available to policyholders, shall include information concerning
19 the optional coverage required by this section; provided that
20 the information concerning the optional coverage required by
21 this section shall also be posted on the insurer's website.



1 (g) This section shall not apply to limited benefit health
2 insurance as provided in section 431:10A-607.

3 (h) For the purposes of this section, "hearing aid" has
4 the same meaning as defined in section 451A-1, and includes
5 conventional and bone conduction hearing aids."

6 SECTION 3. Chapter 432, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is
7 amended by adding a new section to article 1 to be appropriately
8 designated and to read as follows:

9 **"§432:1- Optional coverage of hearing aids. (a) Each**
10 individual and group hospital or medical service plan contract
11 issued or renewed in the State on or after January 1, 2026,
12 shall provide optional coverage for the cost of hearing aids for
13 the member and individuals covered under the individual and
14 group hospital or medical service plan contract.

15 (b) Hearing aid purchases covered under this section shall
16 be subject to a minimum benefit of \$1,500 per hearing-impaired
17 ear every thirty-six months.

18 (c) The member and individuals covered under the plan
19 contract may choose a hearing aid that is priced higher than the
20 benefit payable under this section without financial or
21 contractual penalty to the provider of the hearing aid.



1 (d) This section shall not prohibit a mutual benefit
2 society subject to this section from providing optional coverage
3 that is greater or more favorable to the member and individuals
4 covered under the individual and group hospital or medical
5 service plan contract.

6 (e) Optional coverage required under this section may be
7 subject to deductibles, copayments, coinsurance, or annual or
8 maximum payment limits that are consistent with deductibles,
9 copayments, coinsurance, and annual or maximum payment limits
10 applicable to other similar coverage under the individual and
11 group hospital or medical service plan contract.

12 (f) Any literature or correspondence a mutual benefit
13 society sends to members, including annual information that is
14 made available to members, shall include information concerning
15 the optional coverage required by this section; provided that
16 the information concerning the optional coverage required by
17 this section shall also be posted on the mutual benefit
18 society's website.

19 (g) For the purposes of this section, "hearing aid" has
20 the same meaning as defined in section 451A-1, and includes
21 conventional and bone conduction hearing aids."



SECTION 4. Section 432D-23, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is amended to read as follows:

"§432D-23 Required provisions and benefits.

Notwithstanding any provision of law to the contrary, each policy, contract, plan, or agreement issued in the State after January 1, 1995, by health maintenance organizations pursuant to this chapter, shall include benefits provided in sections 431:10-212, 431:10A-115, 431:10A-115.5, 431:10A-116, 431:10A-116.2, 431:10A-116.5, 431:10A-116.6, 431:10A-119, 431:10A-120, 431:10A-121, 431:10A-122, 431:10A-125, 431:10A-126, 431:10A-132, 431:10A-133, 431:10A-134, 431:10A-140, and [~~431:10A-134,~~] 431:10A- , and chapter 431M."

SECTION 5. The benefit to be provided by health maintenance organizations corresponding to the benefit provided under section 431:10A- , Hawaii Revised Statutes, as contained in the amendment to section 432D-23, Hawaii Revised Statutes, in section 4 of this Act, shall take effect for all policies, contracts, plans, or agreements issued in the State on or after January 1, 2026.

SECTION 6. Statutory material to be repealed is bracketed and stricken. New statutory material is underscored.



1 SECTION 7. This Act shall take effect upon its approval.



S.B. NO. 1494 S.D. 1

Report Title:

Deaf and Blind Task Force; Kupuna Caucus; Health Insurance Coverage; Hearing Aids

Description:

Requires health insurance policies and contracts issued on or after 1/1/2026 to provide optional coverage for the cost of hearing aids at a minimum \$1,500 per hearing aid for each hearing-impaired ear every thirty-six months. (SD1)

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