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## A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO HEALTH.

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

1       SECTION 1. The legislature finds that hearing loss is a  
2       significant public health concern that affects individuals from  
3       keiki to kupuna. National and state-level data indicate that  
4       tens of thousands of Hawaii residents experience some degree of  
5       hearing loss, including many who report serious hearing  
6       difficulty or deafness. Hearing loss becomes increasingly  
7       common with age, affecting roughly one-third of adults in their  
8       sixties, a majority of adults in their seventies, and most  
9       adults in their eighties.

10       The legislature further finds that despite the prevalence  
11       of hearing loss, it remains widely underdiagnosed and  
12       undertreated. Although newborn hearing screenings are in place,  
13       Hawaii lacks a coordinated statewide approach to screening and  
14       follow-up for school-age children and adults. Primary care  
15       providers often receive limited training and reimbursement  
16       incentives to screen for hearing loss, hearing aids and  
17       assistive devices remain prohibitively expensive for many



1 residents, and pathways to diagnosis and treatment are  
2 frequently fragmented and difficult to navigate. Untreated  
3 hearing loss increases risk of cognitive decline and dementia,  
4 falls, social isolation and mental health issues, reduced  
5 workforce participation, caregiver burden, and costly  
6 institutional care. There is critical need for a coordinated  
7 statewide strategy to address these medical, social,  
8 educational, and economic impacts.

9 The purpose of this Act is to require the state health  
10 planning and development agency to develop a comprehensive state  
11 plan on hearing loss focused on improving access, affordability,  
12 awareness, and early detection of hearing loss in collaboration  
13 with community stakeholders, relevant advisory boards, and state  
14 agencies.

15 SECTION 2. Chapter 323D, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is  
16 amended by adding a new section to part I to be appropriately  
17 designated and to read as follows:

18 "§323D- State plan on hearing loss. (a) The state  
19 agency shall develop and publish a state plan on hearing loss.  
20 The state plan on hearing loss shall include but not be limited  
21 to:



- 1        (1) An assessment of current policies, efforts, and
- 2        initiatives addressing hearing loss in the State;
- 3        (2) Epidemiological data on hearing loss in the State,
- 4        including prevalence by age group, geographic area,
- 5        and socioeconomic status;
- 6        (3) An analysis of public awareness and social perception
- 7        of hearing loss;
- 8        (4) Identification of gaps in screening and early
- 9        detection for school-age children, adults, and kupuna;
- 10       (5) Information on access to care and treatment, including
- 11       hearing aids, cochlear implants, and audiological
- 12       services;
- 13       (6) Information on workforce development and training for
- 14       primary care providers, educators, and hearing health
- 15       professionals;
- 16       (7) Associated health concerns, including cognitive
- 17       decline, dementia, mental health impacts, fall risk,
- 18       and communication barriers;
- 19       (8) Recommendations for improving access to services,
- 20       affordability of assistive technologies, and



1           availability of communication supports, including  
2           state policy suggestions; and

3           (9) Identification of pilot or demonstration projects to  
4           expand hearing screening, tele-audiology access, and  
5           community-based outreach.

6           (b) In developing the state plan on hearing loss, the  
7           state agency may consult with pertinent stakeholders, including:

8           (1) Community-based organizations serving individuals with  
9           hearing loss;

10          (2) Health care providers, audiologists, and speech-  
11          language pathologists; and

12          (3) Individuals experiencing hearing loss.

13          (c) The state agency shall publish and submit an initial  
14          state plan on hearing loss to the legislature no later than  
15          twenty days prior to the convening of the regular session of  
16          2027 and an update report pursuant to subsection (d) to the  
17          legislature no later than twenty days prior to the convening of  
18          the regular session of 2029 and each odd-numbered regular  
19          session thereafter.

20          (d) The state agency shall prepare an update report on the  
21          state plan on hearing loss covering the most recently completed



1 fiscal biennium. The update report shall include information on  
2 progress made toward the goals of the state plan on hearing  
3 loss. In addition, an update report shall include:

4 (1) An implementation work plan specifying the tasks,  
5 timelines, and milestones for each goal;

6 (2) Efforts taken by the State to achieve the goals and  
7 strategies identified in the most recent state plan on  
8 hearing loss;

9 (3) Recommendations for state policy, program development,  
10 or legislation relating to hearing loss, and  
11 communication access; and

12 (4) A review of services and initiatives coordinated among  
13 public and private agencies to meet the needs of  
14 individuals with hearing loss and their families."

15 SECTION 3. There is appropriated out of the general  
16 revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$100,000 or so much  
17 thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2026-2027 for the  
18 state health planning and development agency to develop and  
19 publish the state plan on hearing loss, including:



# H.B. NO. 1974

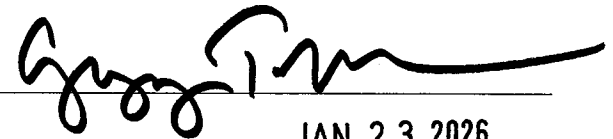
- 1 (1) Coordinating the development of the state plan on  
2 hearing loss through project management and  
3 interagency collaboration;
- 4 (2) Engaging stakeholders statewide, including kupuna,  
5 health care providers, educators, and community-based  
6 organizations, to identify needs, gaps, and  
7 opportunities;
- 8 (3) Consulting with experts and technical advisors in  
9 hearing health, aging, and disability services to  
10 inform plan recommendations; and
- 11 (4) Drafting, reviewing, and publishing the state plan on  
12 hearing loss for submission to the legislature.

13 The sum appropriated shall be expended by the state health  
14 planning and development agency for the purposes of this Act.

15 SECTION 4. New statutory material is underscored.

16 SECTION 5. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2026.

17  
INTRODUCED BY:



JAN 23 2026



# H.B. NO. 1974

**Report Title:**

State Health Planning and Development Agency; State Plan on Hearing Loss; Appropriation

**Description:**

Requires and appropriates funds for the State Health Planning and Development Agency to develop and publish a state plan on hearing loss.

*The summary description of legislation appearing on this page is for informational purposes only and is not legislation or evidence of legislative intent.*

