

Testimony
Higher Education Committee
Representative Svedjan, Chairman
August 20, 2008

Chairman Svedjan and members of the Higher Education Interim Committee, I am Linda Wright, Director of the Aging Services Division, Department of Human Services. I am providing testimony regarding services provided to persons who are deaf or hearing impaired through various Department of Human Services' programs.

Aging Services Division

The Aging Services Division administers the telecommunications equipment distribution program. North Dakota Century Code 54-44.8 defines "Specialized Telecommunications Equipment" as follows: "a dedicated telecommunications device that, when connected to a telephone, enables or assists a person who is communications impaired to communicate with another person utilizing the telephone network. The term may include telecommunications devices for the deaf, amplifiers, and signaling devices. Specialized telecommunications equipment provided under this chapter to an individual may not exceed two thousand dollars in total cost per device".

The Aging Services Division contracts with the North Dakota Association for the Disabled, Interagency Program for Assistive Technology (IPAT) to provide the telecommunications equipment distribution service. Approximately 30 persons per month receive this service. Attachment A

provides more detailed information about the type of equipment that is available.

Vocational Rehabilitation Services

The following core services are available to all clients who qualify for Vocational Rehabilitation Services:

- An eligibility assessment
- Counseling & guidance
- Career Interest inventories
- Training Services
- Job related services:
 - Job search
 - Job Placement
 - Job retention services
 - Follow-up services
- Assistive Technology devices

Services for the deaf/hard of hearing:

- Possible assistance with the purchase of hearing aids
- Assistive technology devices – pocket talkers, fm systems, etc

In fiscal year 2007, Vocational Rehabilitation provided services to 299 deaf/hard of hearing clients, which represented 4.4 percent of all the clients served with various disabilities.

Of those 299 deaf/hard of hearing clients, 102 became employed, which represented 11.4 percent of all the clients who became employed with various disabilities.

Medical Services Division

HEARING AIDS

Coverage Criteria:

Prior Authorization required

Coverage allowed if the follow conditions are present

- Hearing loss of 40 dB or greater at frequencies 500, 1000, and 2000 Hz (Avg. of 40 dB) in the ear with best hearing acuity for all recipients 21 years of age or older or
- Hearing loss averaging of 30 dB or greater at frequencies 500, 1000, and 2000 Hz (Avg. of 30 dB) in the ear with best hearing acuity for all recipients less than 21 years of age and
- Recipient has not had a hearing aid provided by Medical Assistance in either ear for at least five years. Under age 21 may be given special consideration and
- Audiogram must be performed by an Audiologist or licensed hearing aid dispenser and must accompany the prior authorization form. When medically necessary a diagnostic evaluation may be sent with the prior in place of the audiogram along with supporting narrative (e.g. when an audiogram is unattainable).

Limitations:

- Under 21 years of age are allowed binaural hearing aids if the documentation supports the medical necessity

- Lost hearing aids will not be replaced until the allowed replacement time of five years. Special consideration will be given to recipients under 21 years of age.
- 21 years of age and older allowed a monaural hearing aid only
- Monaural users are allowed four batteries per month. Binaural users are allowed 8 batteries per month. Batteries do not require prior authorization.
- Ear molds and ear mold replacements for BTE hearing aids are covered.
- Hearing aids and supplies for dates of service 01/01/2007 thru 12/31/2007: Total paid - \$472,884.13

COCHLEAR IMPLANTS

- Cochlear Implant requests are handled on an individual request basis, as they are performed out of state. Requests are reviewed by the physician under contract with the Medical Services Division.