



Help BC Hear Better

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For Immediate Release

### **Advocating for Hearing Health Care at UBCM Meeting**

**Vancouver, BC, September 11th, 2024** - A resolution by the District of Saanich Council at the upcoming UBCM meeting will shine a spotlight on the urgent need for hearing health care funding in our province. This resolution supports the work of the Help BC Hear Better Group, who are advocating for the creation of a formal provincial Hearing Health Program that includes the funding of hearing aids, particularly for the vulnerable populations of children and seniors.

Hearing loss in children can lead to delayed speech and language development and have an impact on their educational and social development. In seniors, hearing loss contributes to social isolation, leading to poorer health outcomes. Research has shown a link between hearing loss and cognitive decline. Treatment with hearing aids and counselling may potentially mitigate this risk for adults at risk for cognitive issues.

“Hearing assessments, hearing aids, and supportive rehabilitation services are not covered through basic MSP for most children, adults and seniors. A pair of hearing aids can typically cost between \$3,000 to \$8,000 depending on the type and level of technology of the devices. These high costs prevent people and families from accessing necessary hearing health care and hearing aids.” says Elissa Robb, Educational Audiologist and member of the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association and the Help BC Hear Better Group.

“BC lags behind other provinces and territories when it comes to consistent hearing health coverage. Untreated hearing loss leads to increased health care costs. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), for every 1 dollar invested in a hearing health care program, there is return of investment of 16 dollars,” says Dr. Brian Westerberg, Head of Otolaryngology, UBC and Co-Chair of the Help BC Hear Better Group.

Karen Harper, District of Saanich Councillor, who will be leading the resolution at the UBCM meeting, says, “I have personal experience with hearing loss. Wearing hearing aids has made it possible for me to continue my work as a city councillor. By putting forth this motion for discussion, we hope to inspire other municipalities to support this important initiative.”

Dr. Teale Phelps Bondaroff, District of Saanich Councillor and Chair of AccessBC says, "The cost of hearing aids is significant and serves as a barrier preventing people from accessing these vital tools for hearing health. By removing this financial obstacle, we improve health and well-being and ensure that everyone has the opportunity to experience improved communication, enhanced social interactions, and a better quality of life."

#### **About Help BC Hear Better:**

The Help BC Hear Better Group is a passionate team of hearing health professionals, university researchers, and people with hearing loss who are advocating for stable, provincial hearing health care funding in BC. They have developed a detailed briefing note for the Ministry of Health.

Learn more at [www.helpbcheartbetter.ca](http://www.helpbcheartbetter.ca). General inquiries: [info@helpbcheartbetter.ca](mailto:info@helpbcheartbetter.ca).

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**Facts:**

- The World Report on Hearing (2021) by the World Health Organization (WHO) states that by 2050, nearly 2.5 billion people will be living with some degree of hearing loss.
- At least 700 million will require rehabilitation services.
- For every 1 dollar spent on a comprehensive ear and hearing care program that addresses 90% of the population needs, there is a 16 dollar return on investment from reduced health costs and productivity gains from improved employment opportunities
- Only 20-25% of those who could benefit from hearing aids choose to wear them: cost and stigma are the biggest barriers

**The Resolution:****NR17 – Barrier Free Hearing Health**

Whereas a large and growing proportion of our citizens has hearing loss, including three quarters of seniors; And whereas hearing loss leads to delayed speech and language development in children, as well as affecting social development; And whereas a significant factor contributing to lack of hearing aid usage is the high cost of hearing aids, with BC lagging behind other provinces and territories when it comes to consistent hearing health coverage:

Therefore be it resolved that UBCM lobby the provincial government for improved access to hearing health care, including funding support for hearing aids for vulnerable populations most adversely affected by hearing loss: children and seniors.