



ASHA
American
Speech-Language-Hearing
Association

May 24, 2020

The Honorable Richard Pan
Chairman
Senate Committee on Health
California State Senate
State Capitol, Room 2191
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Trailer Bill Language-Proposed Elimination of Services

Dear Senator Pan:

On behalf of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, I write to oppose the Department of Health Care Services' proposed elimination of optional benefits under the Medi-Cal program, which include audiology and speech therapy services.

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) is the national professional, scientific, and credentialing association for 211,000 members and affiliates who are audiologists; speech-language pathologists; speech, language, and hearing scientists; audiology and speech-language pathology support personnel; and students. Over 15,800 ASHA members reside in California.

Audiologists conduct comprehensive assessments that determine hearing loss, auditory function, balance and related systems, and evaluate, select, and dispense hearing aids. Audiologists also assess the candidacy of individuals with hearing loss for cochlear implants and work with medical teams to provide fitting, mapping, and audiologic rehabilitation to optimize the use of these devices.

Speech-language pathologists (SLPs) identify, assess, and treat a variety of communication disorders involving speech, language, fluency (e.g., stuttering), voice and resonance problems, cognitive communication disorders such as memory, attention and problem-solving disorders, and swallowing and associated feeding disorders. SLPs provide services in a variety of practice settings ranging from schools to institutions such as hospitals and rehabilitation centers, early intervention programs, and private practice.

ASHA recognizes the serious budget deficit that California is facing due to the pandemic of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). ASHA realizes that the proposed cuts would be restored if the state received sufficient federal funding. However, under the Medi-Cal program audiologists and SLPs provide ongoing services to some of the highest risk populations including seniors, children, and those with disabilities. Cutting support for these medically necessary services will negatively impact the overall health, well-being, and productivity, and may likely increase future costs of services to the state.

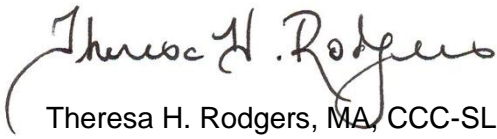
As recently as 2019, Governor Newsom proposed increasing funding to the Medi-Cal program. Focused on the elderly, disabled, and homeless, the Governor's approach was designed to keep people healthier and provide less costly alternatives for community-based services. It is clear that the Governor's intent was not only to improve an individual's quality of life but also to reduce the overall cost of care. California residents who receive timely services from

audiologists and SLPs are better able to lead productive lives; thereby, reducing the financial burden on the state.

Given the considerable budget shortfall, ASHA recommends that other utilization management techniques be considered in lieu of eliminating support of medically necessary services for the state's most vulnerable populations.

ASHA urges you to maintain current support of audiology and speech therapy services under Medi-Cal. If you or your staff have any questions, please contact Eileen Crowe, ASHA's director of state association relations, at ecrowe@asha.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Theresa H. Rodgers". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "T".

Theresa H. Rodgers, MA, CCC-SLP
2020 ASHA President

CC: Senator Melissa A. Melendez
Senator Lena A. Gonzalez
Senator Shannon Grove
Senator Melissa Hurtado
Senator Connie M. Leyva
Senator Holly J. Mitchell
Senator Bill Monning
Senator Susan Rubio