



Hearing is a complex sense involving both the sensitivity of the ear as well as the ability to understand speech. Hearing loss is a common problem due to noise, aging, disease, injury, and heredity. Many health plans offer coverage for speech-language pathology and audiology services.

**Audiologic rehabilitation** services should also be included in that benefit.

Audiologic rehabilitation is provided after a hearing loss has been identified and its goal is to maximize communication. It may include such services as early intervention programs, the fitting of hearing aids, cochlear implants, auditory training and speechreading. Here is a checklist of strategies for approaching employers and health plans about coverage of audiologic rehabilitation services.

## C H E C K L I S T

### FOR AUDIOLOGIC REHABILITATION

## ENSURING COVERAGE OF AUDIOLOGIC REHABILITATION

### REVIEW YOUR EMPLOYEE HEALTH PLAN

- Are speech, language, and hearing services covered? Are audiologic rehabilitation services covered under speech-language pathology and audiology benefits?

### IDENTIFY YOUR TARGET CONTACT

- Who makes decisions about health benefits at your workplace? The head of human resources or a benefits administrator may be your contact person. Does the medical director of a health plan make coverage decisions?

### MAKE CONTACT

- Call or send e-mails or letters to the contact person about coverage of audiologic rehabilitation services. Schedule a meeting to introduce yourself and open a discussion about these services.

### PROVIDE INFORMATION ABOUT AUDIOLOGIC REHABILITATION

- Discuss the importance of communication and its effect on every aspect of a person's life, including family, work, and health.
- Describe audiologic rehabilitation, which includes developing listening skills, speech and voice production, speechreading procedures, and adaptive training with amplification and other assistive technologies. Discuss how a variety of sensory aids (hearing aids, cochlear implants) are used to access sound, and how audiologic rehabilitation assists in using the device.

**C H E C K L I S T** continued

- Audiologic rehabilitation is a medically necessary service. Medical necessity considers whether a service is essential to the diagnosis and treatment of disease or injury, where disease refers to a disorder of body function. Hearing loss is a loss of body function and treatment is available. Some causes of hearing loss include chronic middle ear infections, certain drugs, viral or bacterial infection, birth defects, aging, and exposure to loud noise.

**PROVIDE STATISTICS**

- Hearing loss affects 4 infants per 1,000 births. The prevalence of hearing loss in school-age children is between 11% and 15%. Overall, 18% of the adult U.S. population experiences hearing difficulty.
- Children with mild to moderate hearing loss achieve 1 - 4 grade levels lower than peers with normal hearing unless appropriate management occurs.
- Untreated hearing loss is linked to depression, anxiety, and social isolation.

**PROVIDE OUTCOME DATA**

- Children whose hearing loss is identified by 3 months and who start intervention by 6 months have the same language abilities as peers by kindergarten.
- A study on the impact of amplification on the quality of life in the elderly concluded that hearing aids are a relatively inexpensive intervention for the amount of benefit gained.

**COSTS**

- New 2006 Current Procedural Terminology (CPT) codes for auditory rehabilitation will allow the tracking of costs and utilization rates. Using current CPT hearing and speech related codes, costs to add comprehensive benefits are estimated to be less than 35 cents per member per month for professional services and less than 8 cents per member per month for hearing-related supplies and devices.

**ROLE OF AUDIOLOGISTS AND SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGISTS**

- Both audiologists and speech-language pathologists provide audiologic rehabilitation, with roles being complementary, interrelated, or overlapping. Audiologists assess hearing loss and its impact on communication and provide treatment that may include the fitting and dispensing of a hearing aid, auditory training or speechreading. Speech-language pathologists identify speech-language-communication impairments related to hearing loss, such as voice production, and may address early communication development.

**WHY SHOULD AUDIOLOGIC REHABILITATION BE A BENEFIT?**

- Coverage of audiologic rehabilitation services allows individuals to communicate effectively at work and at home. Being able to understand others, either through sign language, speechreading, or with assistance from technology, and then to express one's needs contributes to a person's core health.



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