

REVENUE: No revenue impact
FISCAL: Fiscal statement issued

Action: Do Pass
Vote: 8 - 1 - 0
Yeas: Bonamici, Bruun, Cannon, Flores, Gelser, Kotek, Maurer, Greenlick
Nays: Richardson
Exc.: 0
Prepared By: Sandy Thiele-Cirka, Administrator
Meeting Dates: 5/2 (Access sub), 5/15 (Full)

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES: Requires health insurers that provide coverage for cochlear implants to provide coverage of bilateral cochlear implants. Provides that for purposes of unfair claim settlement practices, reasonable investigation of claim for bilateral cochlear implants must include recommendation from treating surgeon based on medical literature and findings. Exempts provisions from automatic repeal.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

- Work with insurance companies on language in the measure
- Technical operations of cochlear implants
- How sounds are perceived
- Cost of implants
- Educational challenges that deaf children often experience
- Benefits of having a second implant
- Adult candidates for implants
- Impact of having the attending surgeon medical recommendation for a second implant
- Number of potential bilateral cochlear implant candidates

EFFECT OF COMMITTEE AMENDMENT: No amendment.

BACKGROUND: A cochlear implant is a small, complex electronic device that can help to provide a sense of sound to a person who is profoundly deaf or severely hard-of-hearing. The implant consists of an external portion that sits behind the ear and a second portion that is surgically placed under the skin. Unlike hearing aids, which amplify sound, cochlear implants bypass damaged portions of the inner ear and directly stimulate the auditory nerves.

In 1984, the Federal Drug Administration (FDA) approved the first cochlear implant for use in adults. Five years later, the FDA approved the first implant for children at least two years of age, and in 2000 the FDA approved some types of cochlear implants for children as young as 12 months. Nearly 100,000 individuals worldwide have been fitted with a cochlear implant. Studies supported by the National Institute of Health show that profoundly deaf children who receive a cochlear implant at a young age develop language skills at a rate comparable to children with normal hearing. Research has shown that some individuals with profound hearing loss who receive bilateral cochlear implants (one cochlear implant in each ear) are significantly better at localizing sounds and hearing speech in a noisy room, when compared to individuals with a single implant.