

S. Elizabeth Pitman,
Division of Medical Services
Director
P.O. Box 1437, Slot S401
Little Rock, AR

SENT VIA EMAIL: Elizabeth.Pitman@dhs.arkansas.gov

Dear Director Pitman:

I am writing on behalf of the American Academy of Audiology (the Academy) in support of expanding the current cochlear implant coverage in Arkansas Medicaid to include adults or individuals over 21. The Academy is the world's largest professional organization of, by and for audiologists. Representing the interests of approximately 14,000 audiologists nationwide, the Academy is dedicated to providing quality hearing and balance care services through professional development, education, research, and increased public awareness of hearing and balance disorders.

Cochlear implants are electronic medical devices designed to restore the ability to perceive sounds and understand speech for individuals with moderate to severe hearing loss for whom traditional hearing aids are not sufficient to treat their level of hearing loss. These implantable devices bypass damaged hair cells in the ear and stimulate remaining nerve fibers directly through the application of electrical current.

Expanding coverage of cochlear implants to the adult population would reap benefits for the beneficiaries and the state alike. Individuals who receive a cochlear implant generally increase their median income by \$10-12,000 annually¹ and thereby reduce usage of state disability and welfare services. Studies have shown that in states that provide this expanded coverage, the lifetime net gain is estimated at \$400,000 per patient.² In these ways, expanding coverage would produce a net economic gain for Arkansas. Expanding this coverage would also ensure that children who have received a cochlear implant in the Medicaid program would continue to be supported and receive the necessary accessories and updates after they turn 21.

Medicare, TRICARE, the Veteran's Administration and other federal health plans all provide coverage for cochlear implants (CI) and plans offered by Affordable Care Act Marketplace Plans also generally cover cochlear implants. In 2022, The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) implemented an expanded candidacy profile for cochlear implantation, making the procedure available to millions of additional individuals with hearing loss in recognition of the fact that hearing loss affects approximately 16% of the adult population of the United States, and that older adults with hearing loss have higher rates of hospitalization, death, falls, dementia and depression.

¹ Clinkard D, Barbic S, Amodi H, Shipp D, Lin V. The economic and societal benefits of adult cochlear implantation: A pilot exploratory study. *Cochlear Implants Int.* 2015 Jul;16(4):181-5. Doi:10.1179/17547622814Y.0000000096. Epub 2014 Sep 19. PMID: 25237848.

² Neve OM, Boerman JA, van den Hout WB, Briaire JJ, van Benthem PPG, Frijns JHM. Cost-benefit Analysis of Cochlear Implants: A Societal Perspective. *Ear Hear.* 2021 Mar 4;42(5):1338-1350. Doi:10.1097/AUD.0000000000001021. PMID:33675588; PMCID: PMC8378541.

September 22, 2023

Page 2

In conclusion, the Academy strongly urges Arkansas as part of its System of Care review to expand its cochlear implant coverage to cover adults or individuals over the age of 21. The benefits to this population, both those who are new candidates, as well as those individuals who received an implant while a child and who will need ongoing maintenance services, are significant. This coverage extension will also pay dividends to the State in the form of reduced disability and welfare expenditures. If you have any questions about this letter or the information contained within, please contact Susan Pilch, Senior Director of Government Relations at spilch@audiology.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Virginia Ramachandran". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Virginia Ramachandran, AuD, PhD
President, American Academy of Audiology