

The Hearing Aid Tax Credit

By Patrick C. Fournier BC-HIS

It is unlikely that hearing aids will be covered by Medicare anytime soon. However, with all the talk about health care reform, there is a new push for help with hearing aids. A tax credit bill has advanced in congress. In the House, the bill has the number of H.R. 2329. In the Senate, its number is S.1410. These bills have wide support. Co-sponsors include Denny Rehberg (R-MT), Ron Paul (R-TX), Hillary Clinton (D-NY) and Christopher Dodd (D-CT). As of October 2008 the House had 110 co-sponsors and the Senate had 13 co-sponsors.

The bill also has wide support from the industry and hearing organizations, including the American Academy of Audiology (AAA), the International Hearing Society (IHS), the Better Hearing Institute (BHI) and 15 other major hearing organizations.

Essentially the bill provides a tax credit of up to \$500 per hearing aid (\$1,000 per set). It is available once every 5 years, towards the purchase of hearing aids. It is available for individuals age 55 and over, or for those purchasing a hearing aid for a dependent. To see the specifics of the legislation, go to www.hearingaidtaxcredit.org.

Our state's IHS chapter, The Montana Hearing Society, of which I am the President, is now supporting a Montana version of the tax credit. This bill is modeled after the federal bill. In the state legislature the bill will be carried by Deb Kottel (D-GF). Montana still has an annual projected budget surplus of \$200,000,000. The BHI estimated the cost of the program to the State of Montana to be just \$2,040,000 for the next biennium. To see the specifics of the state bill, go to <http://www.hearingaidtaxcredit.org:80/montana.cfm>



The Montana State Capital Building

Hearing loss affects over 100,000 Montanans, or 13% of the state population. In fact, over 34% of all Montana households include an individual with some degree of hearing loss. Despite these staggering percentages and the fact that hearing aids could treat 95% of all hearing loss, Medicare and most insurance policies expressly exclude coverage, making treatment an expensive endeavor. With a national average cost of \$1,800 per hearing aid (\$3,600 per set) including fitting and follow-up, hearing aid treatment can result in unexpectedly high costs for the average American. Your support is needed, however the Montana state legislature only meets once every 2 years and will convene from January through March of 2009, so time is short!

We need people who would be willing to testify to the legislature about the high cost of hearing aids, the need for some financial assistance and the benefits of hearing aids. Can you help? Do you know of anyone who can? Please contact us toll free at 877-272-9402. Many more people can be hearing better if we take action.