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**Health Care & Wellness  
Committee**

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**HB 1869**

**Brief Description:** Mandating coverage for certain hearing instruments and services.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Green, Flannigan, Appleton, Morrell, Darneille, Hasegawa, Williams, Kenney, Hunt, Sells, Moeller, Lantz, Campbell, Simpson, Roberts, Ormsby and Chase.

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Requires certain health insurance carriers and state-purchased health care programs to cover hearing aids at defined levels.

**Hearing Date:** 2/27/07

**Staff:** Chris Blake (786-7392).

**Background:**

According to the National Institutes of Health, approximately 28 million Americans have a hearing impairment. About 17 of every 1,000 children under the age of 18 have hearing loss and about 314 of every 1,000 adults over the age of 65 have hearing loss. Generally, there are two types of hearing loss. Conductive hearing loss occurs when sound waves are prevented from reaching the inner ear. Sensorineural hearing loss occurs when the auditory nerve or hair cells in the inner ear are damaged by an inherited condition, aging, noise, trauma, or other causes.

Hearing aids are electronic battery-operated devices that amplify and change sound to allow for improved communication. Hearing aids are distinguishable from cochlear implants which do not amplify sound, but bypass the damaged portions of the ear and directly stimulate the auditory nerve.

In 2005, the Department of Health released a sunrise review related to insurance coverage for hearing aids. The review recommended that coverage for hearing aids be a mandated benefit and specifically found that the health benefit of hearing aids outweighed the financial impact of a basic hearing aid benefit.

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*This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.*

**Summary of Bill:**

All health insurance carriers and state purchased health care programs that provide coverage for prostheses must also include coverage for hearing aids. Coverage only applies upon recommendation of the individual's physician, physician assistant, osteopathic physician assistant, or advanced registered nurse practitioner. Coverage for the replacement of hearing aids is limited to:

- Up to \$1,000 every three years for individuals over nineteen years of age.
- Full cost every two years for children ages two through eighteen.
- Full cost up to three times per year for infants and toddlers until age two.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Effective Date:** The bill takes effect on January 1, 2008.