



March 22, 2023

The Honorable Bob Casey
393 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Ben Cardin
509 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senators Casey and Cardin:

On behalf of the Coalition to End Social Isolation & Loneliness (the Coalition), we are writing to express strong support for the recently introduced *Medicare and Medicaid Dental, Vision, and Hearing Benefit Act of 2023* (S. 842). The Coalition represents a diverse group of members including consumer groups, patient advocates, health plans, community-based organizations, behavioral health groups, and private sector innovators and collectively advocates for comprehensive federal and state solutions to address the growing crisis of social isolation and loneliness in the United States. We commend you for authoring this critical legislation and we urge Congress to swiftly pass it.

As you know, individuals that experience hearing loss are at greater risk for social isolation, loneliness, and cognitive decline, affecting approximately one in every six Americans. In fact, one study found that each decibel decrease in hearing perception increases the odds of developing severe loneliness by seven percent.¹ As hearing declines, other aspects of an individual's life may be negatively impacted, including their emotional and mental health, perceptions of mental acuity, quantity of social interactions, family relationships, self-esteem,² and even risk for dementia, the AARP Foundation reports.³ In addition, living in a community where access to hearing health care is limited, can lead to greater isolation.⁴

Importantly, your legislation would repeal the statutory exclusion that restricts dental, vision, and hearing, and would expand coverage to include hearing exams, hearing aids services, and payment for hearing aids. In addition, the bill would increase the federal investment in Medicaid, thus incentivizing more states to provide comprehensive services.

We strongly support this provision of your legislation in particular and applaud you for championing these issues. If passed, this would be a critically important step to support individuals who are facing social isolation and loneliness in communities across the United States.

The Coalition applauds your leadership in authoring this important legislation and we look forward to working with you to ensure its passage.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to the Coalition Policy Director, Daneen Sekoni (dsekoni@healthsperien.com) with any specific questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Am', is positioned above the typed name of the sender.

Andrew MacPherson
Founder and Chairman
Coalition to End Social Isolation and Loneliness

¹ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/19322094/>

² https://www.hearingloss.org/wp-content/uploads/HLAA_HearingLoss_Facts_Statistics.pdf

³ <https://www.aarp.org/health/conditions-treatments/info-2022/hearing-aids-may-lower-dementia-risk.html>

⁴ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK557971/>