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For Immediate Release

Advocating for Hearing Health Care at UBCM Meeting

Vancouver, BC, September 19th, 2024 - A resolution by the District of Saanich Council calling for provincial hearing health care funding was passed today at the UBCM meeting in downtown Vancouver. Led by Karen Harper and Dr. Teale Bondaroff, Councillors from the District of Saanich, the resolution will shine a spotlight on the urgent need for hearing health care funding in our province. This resolution supports the ongoing work of the Help BC Hear Better Group, who are advocating for a provincial Hearing Health Program that includes the funding of hearing aids, particularly for the vulnerable populations of children and seniors.

"This is an important step towards expanding access to critical health resources. I hope that the government of BC will respond favourably to this UBCM resolution and explore ways of improving access to hearing health care services and hearing aids in the province. This will help support those with hearing loss in leading fuller, more connected lives. Investing in hearing health care reflects a commitment to improving public health and well-being across the province, and I hope the government steps up," says Karen Harper, District of Saanich Councillor.

Dr. Teale Phelps Bondaroff, District of Saanich Councillor and Chair of AccessBC says, "I am pleased that UBCM delegates supported this resolution and hope that the government of BC will listen and work to increase access to hearing health care services and hearing aids in the province. This will demonstrate a strong commitment to healthcare equity, ensuring that all residents have access to essential tools for hearing health. This step would alleviate financial barriers and improve quality of life for countless individuals across BC. By prioritizing this initiative, BC will foster inclusivity and enhanced overall well-being."

"Hearing assessments, hearing aids, and supportive rehabilitation services are not covered through basic MSP for most children, adults and seniors. A pair of hearing aids can typically cost between \$3,000 to \$8,000 depending on the type and level of technology of the devices. These high costs prevent people and families from accessing necessary hearing health care and hearing aids," says Elissa Robb, Educational Audiologist and member of the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association and the Help BC Hear Better Group.

"BC lags behind other provinces and territories when it comes to consistent hearing health coverage. Untreated hearing loss leads to increased health care costs. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), for every 1 dollar invested in a hearing health care program, there is return of investment of 16 dollars," says Dr. Brian Westerberg, Head of Otolaryngology, UBC and Co-Chair of the Help BC Hear Better Group.

Hearing loss in children can lead to delayed speech and language development and have an impact on their educational and social development. In seniors, hearing loss contributes to social isolation, leading to poorer health outcomes. Research has shown a link between hearing loss and cognitive decline. Treatment with hearing aids and counselling may potentially mitigate this risk for adults at risk for cognitive issues.

About Help BC Hear Better: The Help BC Hear Better Group is a passionate team of hearing health professionals, university researchers, and people with hearing loss who are advocating for stable, provincial hearing health care funding in BC. They have developed a detailed briefing note for the Ministry of Health.

Learn more at www.helpbchearbetter.ca. General inquiries: info@helpbchearbetter.ca.

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Facts:

- o The World Report on Hearing (2021) by the World Health Organization (WHO) states that by 2050, nearly 2.5 billion people will be living with some degree of hearing loss.
- o At least 700 million will require rehabilitation services.
- o For every 1 dollar spent on a comprehensive ear and hearing care program that addresses 90% of the population needs, there is a 16 dollar return on investment from reduced health costs and productivity gains from improved employment opportunities
- o Only 20-25% of those who could benefit from hearing aids choose to wear them: cost and stigma are the biggest barriers

The Resolution:

NR17 – Barrier Free Hearing Health

Whereas a large and growing proportion of our citizens has hearing loss, including three quarters of seniors; And whereas hearing loss leads to delayed speech and language development in children, as well as affecting social development; And whereas a significant factor contributing to lack of hearing aid usage is the high cost of hearing aids, with BC lagging behind other provinces and territories when it comes to consistent hearing health coverage:

Therefore be it resolved that UBCM lobby the provincial government for improved access to hearing health care, including funding support for hearing aids for vulnerable populations most adversely affected by hearing loss: children and seniors.