Sound Waves

HLAA
Hearing Loss Association of America
Washington State Association

HEARING LOSS THE COMMON INVISABLE DISABILTY

Hearing loss has been shown to negatively impact nearly every dimension of the human experience, including physical health, emotional and mental health, perceptions of mental acuity, social skills, family relationships, and self-esteem, as well as work and school performance.

It can be a barrier to healthy, independent aging and is compounded by the stigma associated with it that can make people hesitate to get help. Many people give up doing the things they love, like attending live theater, volunteering, even their careers or jobs—simply because they can't hear. Isolation, depression, family stress, and even cognitive or balance difficulties can result.

There's hope for people with hearing loss. You're not alone.

Today's hearing devices, coupled with assistive listening systems, assistive listening devices and captions, are changing the lives of seniors and others with hearing loss around the world. Additionally Hearing Loss Association of America and local chapter and state hearing loss support groups like Hearing Loss Association Washington provide information, education, support, advocacy and networking to help people live independently and fully. A extensive list of benefits of HLAA membership can be found on page 3.

How can someone help themselves, a loved one or a client?

A visit to an audiologist is a good start. They can determine if you have a hearing loss and evaluate via testing if you would benefit from hearing aids and advise you about appropriate models. Make sure you ask for a telecoil in your hearing aid so that you can connect to public assistive listening systems such as hearing loops.

You have the right to hear

Hearing loss is considered a disability under the ADA. That means you have the right to effective communication in places of employment, the programs and services of state and local government, public accommodations and transportation. Look for the international symbol of access for hearing loss. This symbol indicates communication access is present. If you don't see a symbol, ask what hearing access is available.

Accessibility

Hearing Aids Aren't Enough

Assistive listening systems are key

Hearing aids, cochlear implants, and bone conductive devices work remarkably well for one-to-one conversations. However, many people continue to struggle to hear and understand in public places: city council meetings, parks and recreation activities, workshops, classes, work meetings, museums, theaters, places of worship, and health care settings. Missing a boarding announcement or getting off at the wrong station may quickly turn travel into a stressful and frustrating experience.

To hear and understand in situations like these, assistive listening systems and devices are necessary. Many people with hearing loss who rely on hearing instruments experience difficulties in loud, crowded, or noisy situations. But many people have never heard about or don't understand assistive listening systems or devices, or how they could benefit from such hearing assistive technology (HAT). Perhaps they see someone with an assistive listening device at the theater but don't know where to find one, or they don't realize it could help them.

- **1.5 million people in Washington have some degree of hearing loss**
- **By age 65, 1 in 3 people has some degree of hearing loss**
- **Over age 75 , 1 out of 2 people has some degree of hearing loss**

Because hearing loss seems so common, many individuals who have hearing loss may not consider themselves to have a disability and do not ask for communication access. They are unaware that the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) provides protections for people with hearing loss, including the right to effective communication.

Bluetooth Technology

Although it is well established that Bluetooth is beneficial for watching TV or using a mobile phone, this newer technology is currently not capable of connecting multiple users to a large public assistive listening system. Consumers [1] need access to both Bluetooth and telecoils.

Connecting to Assistive Listening Systems

Currently, direct hearing device compatibility with assistive listening system can be accomplished via an activated **telecoil** in a hearing instrument.

Many people miss out because their audiologist or hearing health care provider didn't council them about the advantages of using telecoils in public places. While experienced hearing aid users praise telecoils, surveys have shown [2,3] at that fewer than half of all providers counsel clients on the use of telecoils in hearing devices. Less than a third of all providers counsel clients on the availability and use of hearing assistive technologies, specifically assistive listening systems in public venues that can supplement hearing instruments.

[1] Greer Clark, J& Glib, B, (*Audiology Today*, 2019, March/April) www.audiology.org/audiology-today-marchapril-2019/hat-awareness-efficiency-may-be-key-increased-use

[2] Stika, C.J., Ross, M., & Cuevas, C. (2002, May/June). Hearing aid services and satisfaction: The consumer viewpoint. *Hearing Loss*, 25-31.

[3] Frazier, Stephen, (March 2016) http://www.loopnm.com/T-coil_Survey.pdf

The Assistive Listening System of Choice for Many Consumers

Why the Gap in Hearing Loops and Access Options

Cheri Perazolli

At the Seattle Repertory Theatre, dozens of patrons tell us that they've heard better than they have in years—sometimes better than ever—because of a hearing loop. All across the Puget Sound area, hearing loops are reconnecting people with their jobs, communities, transportation, and civic lives. Other places like Sarasota, Wisconsin, and New Mexico tell us a similar story: Hearing loops and telecoils change lives.

Yet many members of the Hearing Loss Association of America-Washington State (HLAA-WA) have said that their audiologist never told them they had a telecoil in their hearing aid. Or that they were never aware of the hearing loop logo—blue ear symbol with the letter "T." Or that they weren't informed how and where to ask for hearing access and hearing loops. Worst of all, some patients have been told that hearing loops are yesterday's technology.

As someone who relies on hearing aids for daily communication and whose life has been tremendously enriched by hearing loops, I'm baffled by this gap in information. Audiologists certainly care deeply about their patients and wish the best for them. Yet it's consumers and patients who are leading this drive for hearing loops—often with little support from the hearing care community.

Do audiologists believe Bluetooth is the answer? Bluetooth is generally designed to connect with iPads, phones, and computers, not to large-venue sound systems. A clip-on microphone can send sounds via Bluetooth to a hearing aid—but only when the wearer is within 30 feet. In a large venue, every person with hearing loss would need to give his/her microphone to the speaker and sit within range. With the assumption that 20 percent of people at any given event wear hearing aids, this means a lot of microphones are needed. Bluetooth is simply not a good choice for use in large spaces.

Are audiologists waiting for a new and better technology? This isn't likely to happen anytime soon. And even if a new technology is introduced within the next 10 years, hearing loops remain the best current solution for universal hearing access.

Perhaps audiologists are simply unaware of the increasing number of venues that are now hearing-accessible to someone with a telecoil. Ten years ago, only a few venues were looped. But today, in Seattle alone, there are dozens of places where someone can hear an A-list author, world-class theatre performance, attend a place of worship or civic meeting and hear through a loop.

Since telecoils are needed to access loops, FM, and infrared assistive listening systems, the more that audiologists educate their patients on their telecoils, the better that hearing aids will help patients communicate. People with hearing aids need communication training in several settings—when speaking to a friend or two, on the phone, with a laptop or iPad, and in public spaces. It seems that more audiologists are educating patients on the first three settings; public venue access gap remains.

Over and over, we hear that loops empower people. With the "Get in the Hearing Loop!" campaign and its many offshoots, including Loop Washington, we're witnessing a true grassroots movement to ensure people with hearing loss can participate like everyone else, seamlessly and discretely. The support and participation of audiologists could definitely help this movement take a huge leap forward in improving public hearing access.

As our health care system changes and our population ages, it seems more vital than ever that hearing care providers, hearing loss support organizations, and patients come together. The drive and passion are there. The technology is there. Advocates from all walks of life are there. What can we do to unite and make all our spaces inclusive, hearing-friendly, and welcoming to everyone?

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Top 10 Benefits of HLAA

hearinglosswa.org • access@hearinglosswa.org

Learn how to live well with hearing loss

1. Learn how to improve your life and technology that can help
2. Receive tips on using the telephone, watching TV, communicating in the car and noisy environments
3. Relax with people like yourself, who understand. You don't have to apologize
4. Experience the benefits of captions and a hearing loop at chapter meetings
5. Learn how to advocate for yourself
6. Become educated on issues that affect you—potential Medicare coverage for hearing aids
7. Attend dynamic, state of the art presentations about hearing loss issues
8. Receive Hearing Life Magazine
9. Become part of the grassroots Get in the Hearing Loop Movement
10. Be part of a National organization advocating for people with a hearing loss

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GET IN THE HEARING LOOP

Get in the Hearing Loop Program
GITHL Advocacy Toolkit
https://www.hearingloss.org/hearing-loop-toolkit

GITHLinfo@hearingloss.org

Find a local HLAA Chapter:
www.hearingloss-wa.org/chapters

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