

## **Two wireless technologies significantly expand the use of hearing aids**

### **Please Support Telecoil and Bluetooth Education for Hearing Aid Buyers**

#### **About Hearing Loss**

Hearing loss is a disability that impacts people in every activity of day-to-day life. Telecoils can make a dramatic difference in a person's ability to hear clearly and participate in the programs and services of state and city governments, and in public environments such as medical centers, conference rooms, transportation hubs, lecture hall and classrooms, banks, entertainment venues and places of worship.

**Telecoils provide people with hearing loss what wheelchair ramps provide people with mobility challenges- access and independence.**

#### **What is a Telecoil?**

A telecoil is an essential feature in hearing aids and cochlear implants that **enables people to wirelessly connect to ADA mandated Assistive Listening Systems in public venues with their hearing device.** When coupled with an Assistive Listening System, telecoils eliminate background noise and increase comprehension. Telecoils work with all ADA mandated Assistive Listening Systems: Hearing Loops (also called induction loops and audio frequency induction loop systems –AFILS), FM, Infrared, and Wi-Fi. Hearing Loops are unique in providing a direct audio connection to telecoil-enabled devices with no additional equipment required.

#### **How Telecoils Work With a Hearing Loop**

In its simplest form, a hearing loop is a wire surrounding an assembly area that is connected to a microphone and amplifier. The loop transmits a silent, electromagnetic signal carrying the sound from the microphone to telecoils that act as receivers in hearing aids or cochlear implants. For users without telecoils, the loop signal would be accessed using a receiver and headphones.

## What is Bluetooth?

Bluetooth is a relatively short-range wireless technology used to connect hearing aids and cochlear implants to personal devices. While this technology is evolving, Bluetooth does not provide the long-range transmission required in large public venues, and does not serve multiple users.

Bluetooth compatible hearing aids can connect to personal devices when combined with an app or additional equipment. Bluetooth is a one to one solution. Bluetooth compatible hearing aids can connect to personal devices when combined with an app or additional equipment.

## Why Both Telecoils and Bluetooth Should Be Offered to Hearing Aid Consumers

Telecoils and Bluetooth both serve important but very different purposes in the lives of people with hearing loss.

- **Telecoils provide a one to many solution** – delivering the audio signal from an Assistive Listening System simultaneously to every person with an activated, telecoil-enabled hearing device within the venue.
- **Bluetooth technology provides a one to one solution** – delivering enhanced audio streaming from personal technology devices to individuals with Bluetooth-enabled hearing devices.

Consumer advocates recommend users be informed and have the benefits of both telecoils and Bluetooth demonstrated.

## Why Legislation Is Needed

Audiologists and hearing aid providers often do not include patient education about telecoils and Bluetooth before or after fitting hearing aids. **In fact, while over 70% of hearing aids and 100% of cochlear implants contain telecoils (Kochkin S. MarkeTrak VIII: Customer satisfaction with hearing aids is slowly increasing. Hear Jour. 2010;63 (1):11-19), a recent consumer survey reported only one-third of first-time hearing aid buyers were told about telecoils.**

(Committee for Communications Access, New Mexico) Without this knowledge, people with hearing loss are hindered from choosing the best option for their needs and lifestyle, and/or from experiencing the full functionality of their aid(s) – which may cost many thousands of dollars.

The proposed bill prioritizes this vital information by requiring audiologists and hearing aid dispensers to explain telecoils and Bluetooth to their patients and customers prior to initial fitting and purchase. **Just a few minutes of an audiologist's or hearing aid specialist's time can change the life of a person with hearing loss.**

Six states have already enacted similar consumer protection laws: Arizona, Delaware, Florida, New York, Rhode Island and Utah. And there is proposed legislation in California, Colorado, Iowa, and New Mexico. **Washington State should help lead this consumer movement in support of people with hearing loss.**

## **Population Impact- Who Has Hearing Loss?**

An estimated 1.4 million Washington State residents have diagnosed hearing loss (extrapolated from 2011 John Hopkins Medicine survey).

Nationally:

- 1 in 5 Americans has a hearing loss  
*Johns Hopkins Medicine, 2011*
- Nearly 50% of people over 60 have hearing loss  
*President's Council on Science and Technology, 2016*
- 30% of Americans 65 to 74 and 50% of those 75 and older have disabling hearing loss  
*NIDCD, 2011*
- 60% of returning veterans have hearing loss and/or tinnitus  
*Hearing Health Foundation, 2014*
- Nationally, almost 29 million employees or students suffer hearing loss  
*HLAA, 2014*

- The US hearing loss population grew at the rate of 160% of US population growth  
*MarkeTrak VIII Study, 2019*

## **Consumer Desire for Telecoil Information**

When asked, “If you are hard of hearing, do you believe audiologists and dispensers should be required to counsel their client on telecoils prior to fitting them with hearing aids?”

95% of survey respondents answered “YES.” (Committee for Communications Access, New Mexico)

When asked, “If you are hard of hearing, would you like to see a law requiring such telecoil counseling in your state?”

95% of survey respondents answered “YES.” (Committee for Communications Access, New Mexico)

## **Communication Access IS Required by Federal Law**

The American with Disabilities ACT (ADA) mandates Assistive Listening System in public venues. But people with hearing aids must have a telecoil enabled device – and know how to use it – in order to effectively connect to these systems.

When the features, benefits and proper use of telecoil enabled hearing aids and cochlear implants are not explained, patients may choose a hearing device without telecoil(s), the existing telecoil(s) may not be activated, or the patient may not know how and when to use their telecoils.

### **Hearing Aid Consumers:**

- Ask your hearing health provider to explain telecoil and Bluetooth benefits to consumers prior to the initial fitting or purchase.
- Support proposed consumer education legislation.

**Washington State Legislators:**

- Learn more about federally mandated communication access.
- Support proposed consumer education legislation.

THIS LEGISLATION IS SUPPORTED BY:

Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) – Washington State Association

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