

November Chapter Meeting



Was that an earthquake???
Water stored? Gas turned off?
Food for 3 days? Candles and matches?

But...what if you need to communicate with emergency personnel? What if you lose your hearing aids? What if you need to evacuate to a shelter?

What accommodations are in place in the city of Long Beach for the hard of hearing in the event of a major emergency?

Sandy Wedgeworth, Program Coordinator, Public Health Emergency Management for the City of Long Beach and Esmeralda Garcia, Access and Functional Needs Coordinator will be at our November meeting. We'll learn what's already in place and what they need to know.

**Thursday November 11 at 6:30 pm
on Zoom**

[Register in advance for this meeting](#)

Chapter Calendar

November 11 at 6:30

Monthly Chapter Meeting on Zoom:
"Emergency Preparedness"

November at Noon (date to come)

Board meeting on Zoom

December 9 at 6:30

Monthly Chapter Meeting:
Zoom holiday celebration!

Lip reading: Wednesdays at 9:30 a.m., in person with face masks and clear shields.

New hearing aid options are coming in 2022

Barbary Kelley, Executive Director, Hearing Loss Association of America and Kate Carr, President, Hearing Industries Association

The U.S. Food & Drug Administration (FDA) issued draft guidelines for over-the-counter (OTC) hearing aids, a first step toward giving Americans more options to address mild to moderate hearing loss. When the rule is finalized, adults 18 and older will be able to purchase OTC hearing aids online or at retail outlets without a medical exam or fitting by a hearing care professional. While final regulations and the first OTC products are still months away, now is an opportune time to educate ourselves on the various types of hearing devices that will be available.

Today there are primarily three types of devices that provide hearing help:

1. Sound amplifiers: One-size-fits-all devices, called PSAPs (personal sound amplification products), intended for recreational use for individuals with no hearing loss that simply make all environmental sounds louder. These are considered hearing "amplifiers" not hearing "aids."

2. Hearing aids: Medical devices for people with hearing loss, most frequently prescribed by a hearing health professional and customized to fit and adjusted to discern sounds in all listening situations. OTC devices are intended for adults with mild to moderate hearing loss and will be sold online and in retail stores without the assistance of a hearing care professional. They will be distinct from prescription hearing aids.

3. Implants: Cochlear implant solutions, or bone-anchored hearing systems, that are designed for those with severe-to-profound hearing loss.

Differences between OTC and prescription hearing aids

Manufacturers will develop new products to bring to the over-the-counter market. Specifications about new features are yet to be revealed; however, there are some distinct differences to help you determine the best option for you.

new options coming in 2022

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1. Self-fit vs. custom-fit. OTC hearing aids will be self-fitting and designed for adults with mild to moderate hearing loss. Without the support of a hearing care professional, the price is likely to be lower. While there may be some adjustable features, it will be up to you to determine your amount of hearing loss and to make any adjustments. For the first time user, the challenge with self-diagnosis could be that you won't necessarily know what you're missing. For instance, you may perceive the device is helping you hear "normally," but normal for you may mean missing the full spectrum of sounds available. In contrast, prescription hearing aids are customized, meaning a hearing health professional will test and identify your level of hearing loss and customize your hearing aids to optimize your hearing.

2. Technology Differences. There is a broad range of features offered on various hearing aids. As new products become available, you'll want to check the features for the products you're considering. For instance:

- Do you want rechargeable or replaceable batteries? (Rechargeable batteries may be more expensive in the short term, but easier to use and less expensive over time.)
- Do you want Bluetooth audio streaming? (Streaming is helpful when talking on the phone, watching TV, etc.)
- Do you want feedback control, volume control, a directional microphone? (These features allow you some control over the device.)
- Do you want a hearing aid that fits behind the ear or is placed in the ear? (Behind the ear may be more comfortable; in the ear may be more appealing and easier to use.)
- Do you want a telecoil? (A telecoil allows you to connect to your telephone or a loop system that provides direct audio input to sound in large-area listening situations.)

One thing you do want to know: the trial period and return terms, no matter what type of device your purchase.

3. The price differential. Check out the price of your options. When available, OTC products will likely be less expensive because they may offer

fewer features and they will be sold without the added services of a hearing professional. In contrast, hearing aids from a hearing professional can cost from \$1,500 a pair and higher, depending on the technology, features, and the cost of services from the hearing care professional. Remember to check your insurance plan. Today, traditional Medicare doesn't cover hearing health, but most Medicare Advantage programs include a hearing benefit as do some federal and private health insurance plans.

Like other technology you use daily there is an upfront investment, so to demonstrate the true value, consider the cost per day over the life of the hearing aid, usually 5 years. For a few dollars a day, you can stay connected and engaged. The investment on your hearing could even benefit your budget in the future since untreated hearing loss is associated with 46% higher total health care costs over a 10-year period.

Why bother with getting hearing help?

Most people who have hearing loss ignore the problem for far too long. According to the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders, National Institutes of Health, among adults aged 70 and older with hearing loss who could benefit from hearing aids, fewer than one in three (30%) has ever used them. Even fewer adults aged 20 to 69 (approximately 16%) who could benefit from wearing hearing aids have ever used them. Overall, an estimated 38-48 million Americans have a hearing loss.

To be healthy and vibrant, it's important to take action when you notice hearing loss. Why? Hearing loss is associated with higher rates of depression, dementia and falls that require hospitalization. Even mild hearing loss doubles the risk of dementia, moderate loss triples the risk and those with severe loss are 5 times more likely to develop dementia.

Another problem associated with hearing loss is isolation. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated how important staying connected is to our happiness and wellbeing. Now more than ever, hearing well is a priority. People should not wait for OTC hearing devices to be on the market. It's important to get your hearing tested now if you think you have a hearing loss and find out what your options are.

OTC hearing aids mean more choices for consumers

Shari Eberts

Good news from the FDA this week—our first look at [proposed rules for over-the-counter \(OTC\) hearing aids](#). The rules look promising, allowing for flexibility in product design and distribution method combined with needed regulation and labeling to ensure product safety.

Hearing Loss Association of America, the largest consumer organization representing people with hearing loss in the United States, issued the following [statement](#):

The Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) is pleased to see the proposed rules on over-the-counter hearing aids published today by the FDA. This is one step closer to seeing OTC hearing devices on the market for adults with mild to moderate hearing loss. We hope adults will be encouraged to take that important first step toward good hearing health. HLAA will comment on the proposed rules within the 90 days.

My take: While not appropriate for everyone, OTC hearing aids fill an important gap in the marketplace for hearing care. Their emergence should spark a wave of innovation and price competition, perhaps even jumpstarting a communication specialist approach to audiological care.

Increased options for hearing devices could also lead to increased uptake and reduced stigma.

Once OTC aids are available—most likely Fall of 2022—millions of American adults with perceived mild to moderate hearing loss will benefit from increased availability of high-quality reasonably-priced devices to help them hear better. I can't wait!

Why Should You Care about OTC Hearing Aids?

Slow down, you might say. Why should I care about OTC devices? If I have severe or profound hearing loss, these devices will not work for me. True, but there are still many reasons for excitement.

1. Increased competition

More competition is typically good for consumers, often sparking innovation and lowering prices. Large consumer electronic companies are eager to enter the hearing space and many already have. For example, earlier this year, Bose launched an OTC hearing aid. Apple does not (yet) market its AirPods Pro as hearing aids, but they function like ones in certain situations.

Products like these put extra focus on hearing enhancement in difficult listening situations, pushing traditional devices to up their game as well.

A new OTC channel will likely push traditional hearing aid companies to broaden their product assortment too. I expect they will create lower priced offerings marketed under different brand names that include streamlined features for the mild to moderate hearing loss consumer. As

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Member profile: Katie Wright

What brought you to HLAA?

In 2013, at one of these first meetings I attended, there was a demonstration hearing loop. I turned to a neighbor and asked, "How can you hear when everyone is talking so softly?" She said, "Turn on your telecoils." I was a telecoil novice but I turned them on...and cried. I could hear. I was hooked.

What is your involvement with the chapter?

I don't remember why but I ended up at a Board Meeting in 2014. During a discussion about the membership roster Bill Busch said, "Unfortunately we need someone who knows Excel." I answered very softly, "I know Excel." That was the beginning. Shortly after that, I was asked to take over the Informer—then it was eventually President and HAT committee chair. Now I'm President of HLAA California!

How does HLAA help you?

HLAA has helped me learn about and cope with my hearing loss. I've made lasting friendships with people who understand what it's like to live in a hearing world.

For more information about our chapter, visit hlaa-lb-lakewood.org

Questions? Contact us by email at info@hlaa-lb-lakewood.org or phone Katie Wright (323) 205-6794

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more choices for consumers

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competition picks up in both channels, people with hearing loss will benefit from a wider array of offerings at a variety of price points.

2. Reduced stigma

As using hearing assistance become more commonplace, the stigma surrounding hearing devices will lessen for everyone. And as people become accustomed to hearing better in difficult listening situations, demand for accommodations like hearing loops and closed captioning could grow too, boosting access for all of us.

3. More Service-Oriented Audiologists

With devices available across multiple channels, the audiologist role will evolve into that of a communication specialist. Expertise in rehabilitation, counseling, and the softer side of hearing loss (non-technical skills like self-advocacy) will take center stage. With higher demand, perhaps these services will even be covered by insurance over time.

4. Enhanced Focus on Hearing Health

Healthy hearing is a critical part of our overall health, but it is easy to ignore, leading to isolation, depression, and even a higher chance of developing [dementia](#). While some people with mild to moderate hearing loss refuse to use hearing aids due to their high cost or stigma, OTC options may be more appealing.

The industry needs to meet consumers where they are. Greater use of communication devices, regardless of their form, keeps people connected and engaged, boosting their well-being and overall health.

5. An emergency back-up pair

OTC devices are not made for people with severe to profound hearing loss, but they could function as back-up devices in a pinch should existing hearing aids go missing or need repairs.

Yes, we still need audiologists

Critics worry consumers could do more harm than good to their hearing with OTC devices. They wonder if consumers can safely manage their devices without the help of a trained professional. While [studies](#) show that [consumers are often able to self-fit effectively](#), people with severe or profound hearing loss will probably always require the expert assistance of a trained professional and the most sophisticated of hearing devices.

For people with mild to moderate hearing loss, a more hybrid approach seems possible. My hope is that audiologists will embrace OTC hearing aids, welcoming everyone who desires to hear better into their practices. When the overall market grows, everyone benefits.



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